State of the Union

How democracy affects the European political process

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Abstract

This paper investigates the correlation between how Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) vote and their respective domestic democracy level. In doing so, it tests two hypotheses – first, that domestic democracy level affects MEP voting conduct. Second, that domestic democracy level affects the way MEPs tend to be disloyal to their European Party Groups (EPGs). The first hypothesis regarding the correlation between democracy level and MEP voting conduct is analysed statistically through logistic regression, the data for which has been collected from VoteWatch, whereas the second hypothesis is tested in a qualitative discussion based upon a smaller dataset.

Both hypotheses are supported by the data, but because the study is based on a single issue, one can only feasibly generalise the findings to similar cases voted upon by the European Parliament. This paper uses a motion in the Parliament that directly concerns democratic values – as such, any conclusions drawn only apply to other cases similarly centred on democratic values. However, the findings of this study underline the importance of further studies on the topic of the influence of democracy levels on the political process of the European Union.
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Introduction

Since its inception, the European Union has existed in a Europe with a general trend of democratisation, accelerated by events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, and secured by the living memory of World War II. As the world-encompassing effects of that conflict fade into memory, so too does the infallible political will that steered Europe towards peaceful coexistence and shared democratic ideals. Today, several member states of the Union are facing domestic threats to the very foundations of their own democracy, some established in recent years.

This presents a unique challenge to the EU, one that it has never had to deal with before – what happens when its own members break away from the very ideals the Union strives to uphold? Two member states in particular come to mind as an example of this issue – Hungary and Poland, both of which are currently working to undermine institutions cementing their own democratic process. The former is famously pursuing an “illiberal democracy” (Buzogány, 2017).

This is called the Copenhagen dilemma, which states that the Union has no tools to control rule-of-law violation in its own member states. In other words, aspiring autocrats within the EU have no established repercussions that they need fear (Ágh, 2017). That this it is a problem the Union must deal with is undeniable. What is not as readily apparent is what immediate effect the situation has on continued European cooperation. On the supranational level, member states interact through several different institutions. One in particular is the arena for the will of the people – the European Parliament, with democratically elected national representatives organised into pan-European party groups. If some of those representatives stand for nations where key democratic ideals have been compromised, there seems to be a risk that the entire procedure has been influenced by authoritarian politics. Of course, this is only true insofar that the domestic democracy level in member states actually affects the way MEPs from that country votes in the Parliament. As such, the point of this paper is to investigate such a correlation, in order to answer the following research question:

Does the domestic democracy level of a member state of the European Union affect the way its representatives vote in the European Parliament?

The study will be conducted in the following order. First, I shall explain my two hypotheses in relation to the “principal-agent” theory, which has seen frequent use in existing research, particularly on how national parties control their MEPs. I, however, will argue that national parties only have a mediating effect on how MEPs vote, and that their domestic democracy level is the more interesting variable to investigate. The basis for this argument will be one vote undertaken in the European Parliament, regarding the situation of fundamental rights in the EU. While drawing any broad conclusion regarding MEP voting conduct in general from this one isolated case will be difficult, the findings of this study will be indicative of issues raised in the Parliament with a direct link to democratic values.
Second, the primary hypothesis will be tested using both linear and logistic regression analysis, whereas the supporting hypothesis will be discussed qualitatively. Following this, the findings will be discussed and put into the context of the principal-agent theory in order to draw as general a conclusion as possible.

**Background and Theory**

Throughout the years, the European Parliament has grown in political importance. Members of the European Parliament have gained various powers, among them the ability to “enact legislation in a wide range of policy areas [and] amend most lines in the budget” (Hix, 2002), for instance. In time, the Parliament became a prominent political actor worthy of close study. This paper focuses on the Members of the European Parliament, and particularly on the factors influencing how they vote.

Simon Hix, a prominent scholar in the field of the European Union, compounded a list consisting of three possible factors determining the voting behaviour of MEPs: Personal Policy Preferences, European Party Discipline, and National Party Discipline (Hix, 2002). This study proposes another factor: Domestic Democracy Level, which is thought to influence MEP voting conduct in the European Parliament, and even serve as an underlying factor explaining other influences on MEP voting behaviour.

**The Principal-Agent Approach**

The European Parliament has been in the academic spotlight for several years, with research being conducted on phenomena like the loyalty of individual MEPs to their European party group identity, or the way various national parties exert control over their representatives. In other words, the idea that there are a number of different factors affecting the way the MEPs vote is not new. Indeed, a significant amount of previously conducted research on the topic of voting behaviour in the European Parliament has been done utilising what is known as the “principal-agent” approach. This theoretical framework has its roots in economic theory, long before it was ever applied to political science, where it was first used in order to investigate whether an insurance selling company can determine the best method of calculating how much to pay an insured individual. Essentially, there are two factors the insurer must take into account – their ability to monitor information regarding nature’s effect upon the individual directly, and their ability to monitor the individual’s actions prior to the incident the claim for insurance is based upon. This is then balanced by the insurance company’s need to reach a break-even point – it is assumed that the company wants to reimburse insured individuals, but they cannot do so by operating at a loss. In short, they strive to provide as much justified reimbursement as they can. However, in a case where the insurer is not aware of all the details, this becomes problematic. For instance, in a case where the insurer is able to monitor an individual’s actions perfectly, but only has secondary information regarding the act of nature which the insured individual is requesting reimbursement for, the insured individual will be motivated to
alter their actions in order to increase the payoff from the insurer (Spence & Zeckhauser, 1971). To clarify, this is the origin of the theory, which has since been developed and adapted for use in other scientific fields.

As such, this is a precursor to the principal-agent approach used in political science today. It has since seen significant development. For instance, the theory was brought into political science in the context of national decision making, and subsequently also applied to delegation and agency among international organisations (see Weingast & Moran, 1983; Hawkins et al., 2006 for examples). Through these developments and adaptations, at its core it remains a theory employed to explain how various agents act given certain constraints, or as these constraints are otherwise known, “delegation.” Delegation here means that there is an actor influencing the agent’s actions, also known as a “principal.” In terms of the original example of the theory outlined above, both the insurer and the insured can be interpreted as an approximation of the modern “agent”. The insurer is influenced by two factors – their ability to monitor the insured before the act of nature for which reimbursement is requested, and their ability to monitor the act of nature itself. Similarly, the insured is influenced by the same two factors – if they know that the insurer has not been able to monitor them prior to the act of nature for which they are seeking compensation, they might exaggerate its effects upon them in hopes of increasing their payoff. The reverse is also true – if they know that the insurer could not monitor the act of nature accurately, they might try to exaggerate it in order to increase their payoff.

In either of these scenarios, the agents are acted upon by principals – factors that influence their decision-making. However, when compared to modern applications of the principal-agent theory, these principals are much more vague. Modern principals employ control mechanisms to ensure the agent acts according to their influence. For instance, Mark Pollack (1997) was among the first to apply the theoretical framework to a study of the European Union, where he suggested it as an alternative to the traditional rational choice theory. He argues that the discretion of the agent depends on the strength of the control mechanisms employed by the principals. Pollack’s study focuses primarily on the European Commission as an agent, with principals consisting of member states of the EU as well as the other supranational institutions of the European Union. Examples of control mechanisms employed by these principals include the possibility of having the European Court of Justice examine the actions of the agent, as well as the threat of amending the constitutive treaties upon which the Commission’s political power rests (Pollack, 1997). Pollack’s work is relevant, as it is the first example of the principal-agent theory being applied to a study of the European Union.

The focus on control mechanisms can be seen as a development of the principal-agent theory, and in modern use that aspect is prevalent. Regarding the theory as a whole, however, it is important to note that it is in constant development. As Delreux et al. puts it, “[t]he principal-agent model should […] not be seen as a fully fledged theory with predetermined outcomes. As a heuristic tool [it] reduces complexity in real-life political processes and it allows us to reveal the key factors, which are essential to grasp and to explain delegation and discretion” (Delreux & Adriaensen, 2017). In this essay, I will
argue that one previously overlooked key factor is how the domestic democracy level of individual MEPs affects their voting conduct in the European Parliament. My contribution will be presented in more detail below.

Originally a theory used in economics, when applied to the European Union the basic idea is that the member states delegate power to the EU, and become principals in regards to the agents in the various European institutions. A principal, in this theory, is an actor influencing the decision making of an agent, such as a national party influencing an MEP (Delreux & Adriaensen, 2017). This relationship also exists between institutions on the supranational level – a member of the Commission, for instance, can play the role of a principal to a member of the European Parliament. Historically, this theoretical framework has been used as a tool to study the European Commission, the European Court of Justice and the European Central Bank (Elgie, 2002).

When it comes to individual MEPs in the Parliament, the traditional approach is to examine them through the previously mentioned lens of their national parties weighed against their European Party Group. It is a generally agreed upon view that these European Party Groups exert considerable influence on their MEPs (Hix, 2004). In other words, research has been conducted on the various ways national parties can control their representatives, and to what extent they are motivated to do so. This is then weighed against another factor influencing MEPs – their European party group. In the words of Emanuel Emil Coman, “[the principal-agent approach] conceives the individual MEP as an agent with two principals: the EPG (European party group) and the NPG (national party group). Each principal pushes the agent to adopt its position in a given roll-call vote” (Coman, 2009).

This approach is not without its flaws, however. Studies investigating MEP loyalty to their national party groups rest on a few assumptions. Chief among them is the backwards construction of said party lines – the way the majority of MEPs from a national party vote is interpreted as the party line. For instance, if there are 10 Social Democrats from Sweden, and 8 of them vote “yes,” that is then interpreted as the way the Social Democrat party in Sweden has told its representatives to vote. The risk here is that what the researcher ends up examining is the stance the EP delegation takes, which may or may not be the same as its national party. “One cannot assess how often the whole delegation defects from the national party line to vote with the group instead.” (Mühlböck, 2012). The nature of the Parliament means that such proxies are necessary in order to determine the national party line, since that is not something the MEPs have to share.

Democracy Level as a Principal

Instead of investigating MEP loyalty using national party lines, this study will investigate the relationship between MEP behaviour in the Parliament and their domestic democracy levels. The idea
is that their individual democracy levels act as a principal upon them, balanced by their European party groups. Traditionally, the principal-agent approach examines agent behaviour through a “chain of delegation,” which regarding national parties means that the party utilises various control mechanisms to ensure their representatives remain loyal to the party in the EP (Hix, 2007). An MEPs domestic democracy level, on the other hand, is more abstract in the sense that nobody is actively attempting to control the MEPs. Instead, democracy levels vary by, for instance, how established and efficient various institutions protecting democratic values are, which then translates into an influence on an MEPs voting behaviour. In other words, I argue that MEPs are shaped by the country they are from, in the sense that they bring domestic values and opinions to the European stage. The primary hypothesis of this study is that a low domestic democracy level will make an MEP more likely to vote in an illiberal fashion, and vice versa.

Naturally, one could argue that the national party groups are the expression of that influence. In other words, perhaps domestic democracy levels shape the national parties, which then in turn control the MEPs. If indeed national party groups exert control over their MEPs in relation to their individual democracy levels, they are only an intermediating variable on the correlation between democracy level and MEP voting behaviour. By going to the figurative well like this, one avoids the issues with proxies mentioned earlier – we do not have to artificially reconstruct national party group lines if we instead focus on the underlying explanatory variable.

To clarify, it should be noted that the term “principal” refers to a specific actor attempting to influence the agent in question. As such, what this paper deals with is an abstract principal, since democracy level is not an active actor, but rather a passive, underlying one. Hence, this study can be seen as an adaption of, and therefore a contribution to, the versatile principal-agent theory. Furthermore, the framework has also seen use in two different fields of research – it originates from economics – so this is not the first time adaptations are made to it.

As was demonstrated above, in the early stages of the principal-agent theory, the concept of control mechanisms was not as central an aspect as it is today. This study seizes upon the previously mentioned assumption made in Delreux & Adriansen’s work, which describes the principal-agent theory as being in constant development. Rather than rejecting the idea of National Party Groups as a principal, which is so prevalent in the scientific discourse as a whole, this study aims to build upon it and investigate a possible underlying variable in the form of MEP democracy level.

Taking this approach necessitates one key assumption, namely that democracy level influences National Party Groups (NPG), rather than vice versa. One could argue that NPG is the explanatory variable influencing democracy level, but this study is grounded in the assumption that democracy level is the explanatory variable. The scope of this essay does not allow me to test causal mechanisms, since that requires data over time. Testing the causal mechanisms at work between democracy level and MEP voting conduct is an avenue of further research. However, this study only aims to establish the correlation between democracy level and MEP voting conduct.
Support for the assumption that democracy level is explanatory to NPGs can be derived from the theory of democratic transition. As Epstein et al. points out in their article *Democratic Transitions* (2006), regimes can be categorised into three different brackets, moving from autocracy, to partial democracy and finally full democracy. Countries can move back and forth on this spectrum – in other words, democratic transition is not a one-way street, since there is a risk of regimes undergoing democratic regression. However, the risk of a democratic backslide is decreased with increased democratisation. This is because increased democratisation means that a regime moves toward a democracy that is institutionally protected, with boundaries restricting executive political power (Murtin & Wacziarg, 2011). The lack of such restrictions is one of the central characteristics Epstein et al. ascribes to partial democracies (Epstein et al., 2006).

The case studied in this paper is a vote conducted in the European Parliament, concerning fundamental rights within EU member states. More specifically, the MEPs voted upon whether they thought that there were issues with fundamental rights in Hungary. In other words, a country with a lower democracy level than its European peers, but still on the higher end of the scale when put in a global context. Epstein et al. classified Hungary as a full democracy (Epstein et al., 2006).

This means that the risk of a democratic backslide should be relatively small, because of institutions protecting the established democratic system. Naturally, it is impossible to claim that there is no such risk at all – rather, this study rests on the assumption derived from the theory of democratic transition, and the classification of Hungary as a full democracy. Important to note is that there is still the question of rating within the category. All member states of the European Union are categorised as full democracies, but they have different democracy rating within that category. Throughout this study, the term “democracy level” refers to the rating within the category of full democracies.

Because of this, for countries on the autocratic end of the spectrum, NPG can influence democracy level, but the closer to full democracy a regime is, the more the reverse starts being true. To illustrate, in an autocratic regime, the NPG is everything, and can decide whatever it wants. In this case, it is clear that NPG influences democracy level. However, in a full democracy, the NPG has to abide by institutions and laws that protect democracy. Since all of the countries in this study are classified as full democracies, this applies even to the states with the lowest democracy levels.

In short, this study argues that, in the studied case, democracy level is the underlying variable. However, it concedes that in other cases – specifically, in other stages of democratisation – the national party group might have a direct influence on the democracy level of a given country.

Moreover, there is an argument to be made for the idea that domestic democracy level also influences an MEPs EPG alignment. The basic idea is that MEPs from member states with a relatively high democracy level are predisposed to join the larger, more established EPGs, whereas MEPs from member states with a low democracy level are more likely to join the smaller EPGs. The smaller EPGs tend to be less cohesive, and MEPs are left with a greater freedom to pursue their own political agenda.
while still remaining loyal to their EPG. The following figure illustrates the basic idea of this paper, which pins democracy level as the most important factor influencing MEP voting behaviour.

Figure 1: Causal Model

Political Context
In light of the recent Copenhagen dilemma mentioned above, which is centred upon how powerless the EU is in handling democratic recessions in its own member states, such a casual relation between democracy level and MEP voting behaviour would further emphasise just how important it is for the EU to devise tools to deal with the situation quickly and decisively. If nothing is done, the situation might spiral out of control, since currently it is a one-way street from democracy to authoritarianism – if the EU has no tools to handle democratic regression, there is nothing to stop more and more individual member states from rejecting the fundamental values of the Union. Furthermore, every member state that does so is a blow to the Union, partly because of the inevitable loss of international face each undemocratic reform means, but mostly because this is a serious political problem in EU:s culture of extremely unanimous decision-making. Every member state that moves away from the core democratic values the Union strives to protect further weakens its ability to make decisions. Ultimately, the EU would be rendered politically inert. As such, investigating a possible correlation between member state democracy levels and MEP voting behaviour is important, since this would present a tangible effect of a phenomenon many are blind to.

European Party Group Cohesion
It is a commonly held belief that party group cohesion in the European Parliament has risen over time. In their article *Political Group Cohesion and ‘Hurrah’ Voting in the European Parliament*, Shaun Bowler and Gail McElroy demonstrate that party group cohesion has been high from early in the Parliament’s history. Moreover, they argue that the observed cohesion is a result of the political culture of the Parliament (Bowler & McElroy, 2015). More specifically, this political culture is one of
Parliament-wide consensus – if the Parliament is to vote on an important legislative motion, discussions and compromises will have been conducted before the vote is even undertaken, in order to maintain high cohesion across all MEPs.

This study focuses on one issue – the Situation of Fundamental Rights in the EU 2016 – which did not meet the European standard of MEP consensus. The final result of the non-legislative motion was 68% of MEPs for, 22% against, with 10% abstaining. In other words, the issue at hand does not manage to attain the cohesion the political culture of the Parliament prefers. This fact alone makes it an interesting case to study, as it allows one to investigate MEP disloyalty. In the context of the principal-agent relationship, disloyalty to one’s EPG means that an MEP disregards one of the principals influencing their voting conduct. Furthermore, if there is a pattern to MEP loyalty, this could arguably point to the second MEP. In other words, there is an opportunity here to reinforce the notion that domestic democracy level is the other principal influencing MEP voting behaviour, at least insofar that it is possible to determine that there exists a pattern of MEP loyalty to their EPG based on their democracy level.

**Hypotheses**

To clarify, this paper aims to test two hypotheses. Firstly, that domestic democracy level affects the way MEPs vote in the European Parliament. This hypothesis follows from the assumptions made based on the theory of democratic transition mentioned above. Namely, that democracy level is underlying to NPG influence. NPG influence is the traditional approach when applying the principal-agent theory to the European Parliament, so this study only aims to add a layer to the conventional method, rather than fundamentally changing it.

Secondly, that domestic democracy level affects the way MEPs tend to be disloyal to their EPG. In other words, MEPs from member states with lower democracy levels will be disloyal in an authoritarian way; that is, they will be more likely to break their EPG party line in favour of voting in an authoritarian manner, which in this case translates into voting against the motion. The inverse is hypothesised to be true for MEPs belonging to member states with high democracy levels – they are predicted to vote in a liberal manner, or in other words for the motion.

The intent behind the second hypothesis is for it to serve as support to the primary one – if there is indeed such a pattern, it would reinforce the notion that the domestic democracy level of MEPs affects their voting behaviour in the European Parliament. If an MEP votes in a fashion disloyal to their EPG, it means that they are breaking the previously mentioned culture of consensus. To the extent that it is possible to determine that MEP domestic democracy level affects the way they are disloyal to their respective EPG, this phenomenon exemplifies how domestic democracy level can influence MEP voting conduct. Put differently, the second hypothesis becomes a tool to investigate the correlation between domestic democracy level and MEP voting behaviour from a different perspective, in order to strengthen the first hypothesis. Similarly, this hypothesis can also be derived
from the theory of democratic transition, as it rests on the assumption that democracy level is an underlying factor explaining the correlation between democracy level and MEP voting conduct.

**Method**

The main hypothesis of this paper is that a lower domestic democracy level influences MEPs to vote with an authoritarian agenda. In order to illustrate this, the case investigated in this study is one that reflects democratic values. It is a vote on whether the Parliament thinks there is a problem with the current situation regarding human rights in the EU. According to the hypothesis, MEPs with high democracy levels are more likely to vote “yes” in this instance, and vice versa.

To clarify, the dependent variable here is “Vote,” which can assume value of either 1 (for) or 0 (against). A vote for the motion (1) translates to a vote for democratic values, and a vote against the motion (0) translates to a vote for authoritarian values. Throughout this essay, a vote for the motion will be referred to as a liberal vote, and a vote against the motion as an authoritarian one.

The primary method used in this study is logistic regression. Since my response variable is dichotomous, a linear regression analysis would yield flawed results. Logistic regression analysis allows us to determine the likelihood of voting “yes” on a given value of “Democracy Level.” By breaking the study into four different models, this will be demonstrated below. Model 1 is an ordinary linear regression analysis, model 2 is a logistic regression analysis, and model 3 is a logistic regression analysis employing various dummy variables to control the correlation between democracy level and MEP voting behaviour in relation to their European Party Group membership.

An alternative way of determining whether domestic democracy level affects the voting behaviour of MEPs could be to conduct interviews, but several factors make this approach difficult. Chief among them is the sheer number of MEPs, and even if one were to carefully select a smaller number of interviewees the nature of the research question is such that honest answers would be hard to find. This would then create validity problems, because the interview questions would have to be circumspect. In light of this, examining data from a past vote avoids validity concerns.

The material for this study has been collected from VoteWatch, an independent organisation providing, among other things, data sets of political decisions made in the EU (VoteWatch, 2018). Freely available are data declaring, among other things, how individual MEPs have voted on a given issue, which member state they represent, and which European Party Group they belong to. The case chosen for this study is a motion for a non-legislative resolution voted upon by the European Parliament. Essentially, the Parliament voted on whether they thought there was a problem with the current situation regarding fundamental rights within EU member states (European Parliament, 2018). “[N]either national sovereignty nor subsidiarity can justify or legitimise the systematic refusal on the part of a Member State to comply with the fundamental values of the European Union” (European Parliament, 2018). In short, these values are “respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom,
democracy, equality, and the rule of law.” This means that the underlying concern of the motion is the previously mentioned Copenhagen Dilemma – what happens when member states defy fundamental values of the Union? As such, the correlation between the domestic democracy levels of MEPs and their voting behaviour should be at its clearest in this case, since the vote directly concerns democratic values.

The case investigated in this study has been chosen because of the nature of the issue discussed. In order to be able to draw as clear a conclusion as possible regarding the effect of the level of democracy in the various member states, the issue must reflect democratic values. As such, “democratic values” have been operationalised as the issue of “Situation of Fundamental Rights in the EU 2016” which the European Parliament voted upon recently.

Since this study is focused on a single issue, generalising my findings will be difficult. As a result, the primary aim of this paper is to serve as a stepping stone by highlighting an alternative approach to studying MEP voting behaviour in the European Parliament. Moreover, this particular case must be viewed as a “most-likely”-case, since it is an established fact that at least the Visegrád countries strive for mutual cooperation (International Visegrad Fund., 2018). This is important, because the Visegrád group consists of Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic – the former three have among the worst domestic democracy levels in the entire European Union, and as such are of particular interest to this paper. This fact complicates matters by suggesting an alternate explanation for the studied correlation – what if the correlation between democracy level and MEP voting conduct exists in the case studied only because of Visegrád solidarity? Moreover, Simon Hix and Abdul Noury found that “MEPs from the new member-states from Central and Eastern Europe […] vote more along national lines” than MEPs from other countries (Hix, Noury, 2009). This is interesting, especially considering the fact that Eastern European member states tend to have worse democracy levels than their Western counterparts.

First of all, one could argue that even if that is the case, the Visegrád group in general has an overall low democracy level, and that there exist equivalent, if less clearly defined, groups with generally high democracy levels. For instance, the Nordic countries are on the higher end of the spectrum, and vote in a similarly unified fashion despite not having a clearly stated intent of doing so. In other words, democracy level becomes an underlying factor explaining how these groups vote.

To clarify, a reasonable concern was raised above – that MEPs from Hungary would be more likely to vote “No” regardless of their democracy level, since their own country is being targeted.

Furthermore, Hungary is part of the Visegrád group, as was outlined above, which is a group of European member states with close ties between their political alignments. Since a member of the group is being targeted by the vote in the European Parliament, a reasonable concern is that the other members of the Visegrád group will vote to support Hungary, which in this case means “No.”
Furthermore, the Visegrád countries are all on the lower end of the democracy spectrum within the European Union, which means that the correlation investigated in this study also predicts them to vote “No” to a greater extent than member states with higher democracy levels. In other words, this means that there is a risk that all Visegrád countries are predisposed to vote “No” regardless of their democracy level, which would render the results of this study inconclusive.

To combat this problem, a logistic regression controlling for the Visegrád group was conducted. This means that Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic were excluded from the analysis, in order to determine whether the studied correlation between democracy level and MEP voting conduct remained in the rest of the EU. Since these four countries are all on the lower end of the democracy spectrum, removing them is predicted to weaken the correlation significantly. Also, they account for more than 12% of the population in the EU (Eurostat, 2018), and more than 14% of all MEPs in the European Parliament (European Council, 2013). Smaller populations, and especially ones that have been systematically reduced to exclude certain groups, will usually yield results less statistically significant.

In short, the predicted result of this analysis is that the correlation between democracy level and MEP voting conduct remains, to a lesser degree. The result of this analysis will be presented below.

When it comes to the possibility of generalisation, focusing on a single issue presents a problem. However, the observed correlation should be present in any similar issue – that is, any motion that directly concerns democratic values like the one studied here.

The data gathered from VoteWatch revealed the name of the MEPs, which party group they belong to, their nationality, how they voted, and whether or not they remained loyal to said party group. In other words, the dataset contains data for 751 MEPs, but those who were absent have been coded as “missing,” which means that they have been excluded. One could argue that deliberate absence could be a strategic tool employed by MEPs who perhaps did not agree with their EPG line, but such reasonings quickly bring one to the realm of speculation. It could just as well be the case that some MEPs simply could not attend. In order to avoid arbitrariness, I have elected to exclude all absent MEPs from the dataset.

Furthermore, there are eight European Party Groups (EPGs), but the dataset contains nine alignments – MEPs either belong to one of the EPGs, or they are non-inscrits (NI), which means that they do not belong to any group.

**Variables**

As previously mentioned, the dependent variable in this study is “Vote,” and it is dichotomous, which means that it can assume a value of either 1 or 0. 1 means that a MEP voted “yes,” and 0 means that they voted “no.” Moreover, “yes” in the context of the motion voted upon means a vote cast in a liberal manner, whereas “no” translates to a vote in an authoritarian direction.
The main explanatory variable is Democracy Level, and it is on an interval scale. It can assume values ranging from 1 (low democracy) to 10 (high democracy). It is important to keep in mind that all units of analysis are in the European Union, which means that even countries considered to have a low democracy level are on the higher half of the spectrum (see Table 1 below). As this is the explanatory variable, it is a pivotal aspect of the study. Moreover, it is vague enough to merit discussion.

Providing a theoretical definition of democracy is a monumental undertaking, one which I shall not attempt here. Instead, it is sufficient to state that the definition used in this paper is of an ideal nature, since it is on an interval scale. In short, this means that the are qualitative differences between various democracies, and that one democracy can be more democratic than another (Dahl, 1989). This is the cog upon which this paper turns – after all, MEP voting conduct is predicted to vary depending on differences in their individual democracy ratings.

As for the operationalisation of this central concept, it has been borrowed from The Economist’s Intelligence Unit and their index of democracy. As mentioned above, countries are rated on a scale from 1 to 10. This rating is based upon 60 indicators, which are grouped into five categories: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; and political culture (The Economist’s Intelligence Unit, 2016). This, in other words, becomes the operationalisation for democracy in this study – a critical evaluation of five different metrics, all vital for an ideal democracy, combined into a single value.

There are other democracy indices compounded by different organisations. One example is Freedom House, which was considered for this study. Because this study is interested in countries with relatively small differences in their democracy levels, however, the EIU index proved more suitable simply because it provided a more detailed scale. In other words, the EIU index gave me a greater ability to differentiate between the democracy levels of the various EU member states. Below follows a table consisting of the EIU democracy ratings for all EU member states.

**Table 1: EIU Democracy Index for the EU**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Democracy Level (1-10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>9.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>9.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>9.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>9.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>8.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>8.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>8.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>8.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>8.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>8.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>8.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>7.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>7.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote</td>
<td>0=Against 1=For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>0=Absent 1=Participated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Level</td>
<td>This variable is on an interval scale ranging from 1 to 10, where:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1=Low democracy 10=High democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Line</td>
<td>0=Against 1=For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Democracy Level</td>
<td>Control groups consisting of the four highest and four lowest EU member states, where:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0=Low (Romania, Croatia, Hungary &amp; Poland) 1=High (Sweden, Finland, Ireland &amp; Denmark)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Name of Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Party Group</td>
<td>Name of European Party Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Marks MEP loyalty to their EPG party line, where:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0=Disloyal 1=Loyal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides the explanatory variable, a number of control variables are used throughout the study. One is Nationality, which is on a nominal scale, and allows me to see how MEPs from the same country voted. Another is Loyalty, which shows whether an MEP was loyal to their European party group. It is a dichotomous variable, where 1 means “loyal” and 0 means “disloyal.” Another nominal variable employed in this paper is Party Group, showing which European party group the various MEPs belong to. The table below shows how the various variables have been coded.

Table 2: Coding of Variables

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2017
Results

In this section the primary hypothesis will be tested, followed by the supporting hypothesis. The hypotheses will be tested separately, using different methods – initially, the primary hypothesis will be analysed statistically, whereas the supporting hypothesis will be discussed qualitatively.

Testing the Primary Hypothesis

Figure 1 below is a regular scatterplot with a plotted OLS-line depicting how the MEPs voted in relation to their own domestic democracy levels, with jittered data points to enhance clarity. Individual MEP democracy level is based on their nationality, which means that two MEPs from France, for instance, both have a democracy level of 7.8.

As we can see, this figure supports the hypothesis that the domestic democracy level of an MEP affects their voting behaviour. A rising democracy level means that MEPs are increasingly likely to vote in a liberal manner, or in other words, “yes” (1). However, since the response variable is dichotomous, a linear regression analysis is not the optimal tool for this study. This is because the response variable only can assume a value of either “1” or “0,” but Figure 1 shows that countries with...
a democracy level of 7.5 should take an average y-value, “vote,” of 0.65. Performing a linear regression with a dichotomous response variable yields counterintuitive results, as we can see in Table 1 below:

**Table 3: Linear Regression Output**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficients</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>-.122</td>
<td>.176</td>
<td>-.693</td>
<td>.489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Level</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>5.049</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that the correlation between the independent variable Democracy Level and the response variable of Vote is positive, and statistically significant at a 99% confidence level. In other words, a higher value on the independent variable means that MEPs are more likely to vote “yes,” which means that this initial regression analysis supports the hypothesis this paper argues for.

However, immediately apparent here is the fact that the constant, also known as the intercept, is negative. This raises a red flag, since the response variable cannot assume a value other than 1 or 0. In other words, this analysis is flawed.

As a result, we will now examine the issue using logistic regression analysis. It should be noted that the difference between the two is generally not extreme, and that the logistic regression analysis is likely to yield results similar to the initial linear regression analysis. This means that the initial model serves as a tool to present the covariation the study is examining in a clear and understandable way.

**Logistic Regression**

As previously mentioned, when studying a dichotomous response variable, or a categorical phenomenon, linear regression yields flawed results. By employing logistic regression analysis instead, we are able to make predictions despite the binary nature of our response variable. Figure 2 below depicts the predicted probability of voting “yes” for each value of the explanatory variable democracy level.
At first glance, Figure 2 supports the main hypothesis of the paper – an increase in democracy level increases the predicted probability of an MEP voting “yes.” Table 4 below clarifies the relationship in numerical terms.

Table 4: Logistic Regression Output

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Level</td>
<td>.617</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-3.661</td>
<td>.986</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A logistic regression analysis allows one to calculate the predicted probability of having voted “yes” for all different values of the independent variable. One step on the x-axis above translates to an increase of 61.7% of the odds of voting “yes.” The Odds Ratio in Table 4 above tells us the relationship in terms of odds between any two steps on the x-axis. For instance, had the odds ratio been 1, the independent variable would have had no correlation with the response variable. Had the odds ratio been two, the odds for voting “yes” would have doubled for each step on the x-axis. An odds ratio of 1.853 translates into an increase in the odds for voting “yes” by 85% for each step on the x-axis. In other words, the figure above reaffirms what the earlier linear regression analysis told us –
MEPs with higher domestic democracy levels do have a greater chance of voting in a liberal fashion. However, it also shows that this correlation diminishes at the very top of the democracy spectrum, with a steeper climb at lower levels. This is because of the nature of the logistic curve, which is the shape the result of a logistic regression analysis assumes. Normally, the logistic curve takes the shape of an “S,” which means that near the extreme values of the y-variable, the difference in the effect of the explanatory variables diminishes. This is also the case in the logistic regression analysis presented above. However, the scope of this study is limited to the democracy levels of member states of the European Union, which means that we do not see the full extent of the democracy spectrum. The lowest democracy rating is Romania’s 6.44 on a scale from 1-10. In other words, this study is concerned with only the upper half of the “S”-shape of the logistic curve, which explains the diminishing effect of democracy level on the response variable.

Using logistic regression means that we cannot calculate the regular R2 fit level we use for linear regression. As a replacement, various methods of calculating how close the data are to the logistic regression line have been invented by various researchers. The two final rows in the table above show these model tests, and in essence the idea is the same as that of the R2 value – the closer to 1, the better the fit. In other words, model 2 alone does not explain a great amount of the variability in the data, which indicates that the model can be improved.

Before changing the model, the effect of the Visegrad group will be controlled for, in order to address the concerns contingent on the case selection. Table 5 below illustrates the strength of the correlation between democracy level and MEP voting conduct in the EU, without the Visegrad group.

### Table 5: Logistic Regression Output Controlled for Visegrad Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Level</td>
<td>.309</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>1.363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.051</td>
<td>1.296</td>
<td>.418</td>
<td>.350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Tests</td>
<td>Cox &amp; Snell R Square</td>
<td>Nagelkerke R Square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Immediately apparent is that the strength of the correlation has been reduced when compared to the results of Table 4 above. Both the odds ratio and the strength of the B-coefficient has been sizably reduced, and the results are statistically significant to a lesser degree than the original analysis. This result was predicted earlier, because controlling for the Visegrad group means systematically removing some of the most extreme values from the analysis. Poland alone accounts for nearly 7% of all the MEPs in the Parliament, and the Visegrad group, as a whole, for more than 14% of all MEPs. The fact that the correlation remains, albeit diminished, confirms the notion that there is a correlation between democracy level and MEP voting conduct.
In order to construct a better model than the first logistic regression presented above, we turn to the principal-agent framework. The theory outlines two primary principals – National Party Groups and European Party Groups. As previously stated, this essay argues that domestic democracy level is the underlying explanatory variable to whatever effect NPGs may have on MEPs. This means that there is still one variable to control for, namely MEP EPG alignment. In order to perform this analysis, nine dummy variables have been created – one for each party, and one for unaligned MEPs. It is the latter group which has been chosen as the reference variable for the following logistic regression analysis. The decision to exclude unaligned MEPs was based on the fact that they represent no EPG, and as such lack any of the principal influence we are looking for. Table 6 below shows the size of the various European Party Groups.

Table 6: European Party Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>European Party Group</th>
<th>Number of MEPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European People’s Party (EPP)</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive Alliance of Socials and Democrats (S&amp;D)</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Conservatists and Reformists (ECR)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE/ADLE)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European United Left-Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens-European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD)</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The European Parliament, 2018

The effect of these European Party Groups on the correlation between domestic democracy level and MEP voting conduct has been tested in Table 6 below.
According to Table 7, domestic democracy level retains its statistical significance when controlling for the various EPGs, and its correlation with the response variable is enhanced – the odds ratio increased from 1.853 to 2.628. However, a number of the EPGs are also shown to have a correlation with how MEPs vote in the Parliament, statistically significant at a 99% confidence level. This means that membership of those groups (EPP, S&D, ALDE/ADLE) has a statistically determined correlation with MEP voting conduct. Worth noting is that S&D and EPP are the two largest party groups in the European Parliament. Furthermore, the approximated R2 model tests yield significantly better results, which means that model 3 is much better than model 2 at explaining the variation in the data. In terms of the principal-agent theory, this makes sense, since this model controls for both principals this study is concerned with.

In the case of Greens/EFA, all of their MEPs voted “for,” which means that no matter their individual domestic democracy level, they voted along their EPG party line. One way to interpret this result is that for these MEPs, their EPG was their only relevant principal, at least for this issue.

Naturally, it may also mean that their democracy levels were high across the board, which would mean that their principals converged – if all MEPs of Greens/EFA have high domestic democracy levels, this means that both of their principals influenced their vote in the same way. Ultimately, this means that in the case of Greens/EFA, the main hypothesis that democracy level affects the way MEPs vote cannot be investigated, but, arguably, this does not undermine the hypothesis. The inverse is true for ENF – all MEPs belonging to this party group voted “against,” which creates the same problems for this control variable.

**Table 7: Logistic Regression Output with EPG Dummies (Model 3)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Level</td>
<td>.966</td>
<td>.223</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>3.731</td>
<td>.872</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>41.710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFDD</td>
<td>.432</td>
<td>.914</td>
<td>.637</td>
<td>1.540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens/EFA</td>
<td>22.398</td>
<td>5833.080</td>
<td>.997</td>
<td>5335137000.812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>4.826</td>
<td>.934</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>124.742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALDE/ADLE</td>
<td>5.383</td>
<td>1.313</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>217.625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUE-NGL</td>
<td>2.375</td>
<td>.955</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>10.753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECR</td>
<td>-1.127</td>
<td>1.030</td>
<td>.274</td>
<td>.324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENF</td>
<td>-19.895</td>
<td>7465.487</td>
<td>.998</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-9.068</td>
<td>1.969</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Tests</th>
<th>Cox &amp; Snell R Square</th>
<th>Nagelkerke R Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.459</td>
<td>.688</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cox & Snell R Square and Nagelkerke R Square are model tests that provide an indication of how well the model fits the data. A higher value indicates a better fit.
The remaining party groups are statistically significant to a lower degree than democracy level, which indicates that for MEPs from these EPGs, domestic democracy level remains the primary principal acting upon their behaviour in the Parliament.

In short, this can be interpreted as an indication that domestic democracy level is not the be-all end-all principal directing MEPs in the Parliament, much in line with the principal-agent theory. In this particular case, some EPGs have a statistically significant correlation with MEP voting conduct, especially the larger groups. A possible answer as to why this is the case could be that these groups have a greater group cohesion, driven by their identity as the two major parties in the Parliament. In turn, this would mean that the smaller groups are less coherent, and perhaps attract MEPs with more diverse agendas who were unable to find an ideological home in any of the more established party groups. In this regard, they could be likened to one-issue national parties, characterised by uniting politicians with different agendas, who happen to agree on one key issue championed by the party. As such, MEPs belonging to the smaller EPGs would have greater freedom to act based upon their domestic democracy level.

MEPs from countries with democracy levels on the lower end of the spectrum might be more inclined to join these less cemented party groups, which would explain the difference in EPG correlation with their voting behaviour illustrated above. Provided that some MEPs from countries with high democracy levels also belong to the smaller EPGs, these party groups would be far less coherent than the major ones. In terms of the principal-agent framework, this is explained by the difference in their respective principals. All members of a particular EPG share that principal, but insofar that they come from different countries (specifically from opposite ends of the democracy spectrum), their other principal is vastly different, since one MEP could have a very high democracy level while another could have a relatively low one, while still belonging to the same EPG. On the other hand, if the major EPGs are less attractive for MEPs from countries with low democracy levels, these will remain fairly cohesive since the majority of MEPs will have democracy levels on the higher end of the scale. Moreover, their sheer size ensures that any statistical outlier remains just that – an exception to the norm. The statistics of smaller EPGs suffer more from disloyal MEPs, simply because they have fewer members, which means that statistical outliers are more difficult to write off as such.

If this is the case, the larger EPGs will already have selected for MEPs with relatively high democracy levels. In turn, this means that democracy level becomes an underlying factor not only to NPGs, but to EPGs as well, as was theorised above. Naturally, this is nothing more than speculation, but further study of this question could potentially yield interesting results.
Figure 3: MEP voting behaviour in different EPGs

Figure 3 above illustrates how MEP voting behaviour differs between the various European Party Groups, which is important partly because of the problem presented by the homogenous voting behaviour in a number of the different EPGs. In both ENF and Greens/EFA, all MEPs voted in one particular way, which skewed the results in the logistic regression analysis above.

When it comes to the two largest groups, the figure above confirms that their MEPs have voted in a unified fashion.

In model 3, three EPGs did not have a statistically significant correlation with MEP voting behaviour in this particular motion. This is presumably because MEPs from these groups to a large extent voted differently from one another. In other words, these three groups did not have strong party cohesion. It is also worth noting that they are among the smaller groups, with EFDD being the second to smallest group in the Parliament. This is in line with the theoretical argument outlined previously – European Party Groups of a smaller size tend to be less cohesive, since they MEPs with a wider range of opinions.
In summation, the primary hypothesis that domestic democracy level affects MEP voting conduct in the European Parliament is empirically supported by the data presented above, in the three different models employed.

Testing the Supporting Hypothesis

In this segment the supporting hypothesis will be tested in a qualitative discussion based upon a specific part of the data presented below.

Figure 4: Scatterplot of MEP Loyalty versus Vote (Model 4)

Figure 4 illustrates how MEPs from member states with extreme democracy levels behave in the European Parliament. The units of analysis have been split using a dichotomous variable called “Extreme Democracy Values” where they have been coded as either “High” or “Low”. The former
includes Sweden, Denmark, Ireland and Finland, whereas the latter includes Romania, Hungary, Croatia and Poland. The “High” group were chosen because their democracy level is above 9, and the “Low” group because their democracy level is below 7. This split is arbitrary, but it allowed me to include critical member states – such as Hungary and Poland – while keeping the size of the control groups reasonable. Moreover, the split allowed me to use the Nordic countries as a control group (in addition to Ireland), which reinforces the point made earlier that the grouping is similar in function to the Visegrad group – individual member states tied together by cultural and political similarities that end up voting as a group.

The results indicate that there is a pattern to the disloyalty of MEPs toward their party groups. MEPs from countries with a high domestic democracy level are more likely to be disloyal to party groups with an authoritarian line, and vice versa. In other words, in this case the overwhelming majority of MEPs from countries with a high democracy level voted in a liberal way, regardless of their European party line. The opposite is also true – as we can see, when MEPs from a country with a low democracy level broke away from their party line, it was to vote for the authoritarian option.

First of all, this pattern emphasises the primary hypothesis of this paper. If MEP disloyalty has a different pattern depending on democracy level, this means that they are more likely to break away from liberal party lines if their democracy level is low, and vice versa.

No statistical analysis will be performed on this data. Instead, the scatterplot above serves an illustrative purpose. For instance, it shows that while there seems to be a pattern to MEP loyalty – at least in this non-legislative motion – there are examples of MEPs belonging to the “High” group belonging to EPGs with an authoritarian party line. This may undermine the view that democracy level can serve as an explanatory factor to MEP EPG alignment, since their EPG party line here consists of the authoritarian option.

The supporting hypothesis is empirically supported, as shown in Figure 4 above. It is important to note that this part of the analysis used significantly less units of analysis than the analysis testing the primary hypothesis did. In other words, further study on this topic based upon a greater amount of data would be useful, in order to strengthen the conclusion.

**Discussion**

As previously mentioned, democracy level as a principal does not fit flawlessly into the existing principal-agent theoretical framework. Primarily, this is because this approach views principals as active influences – they utilise various control mechanisms to keep their agent under control, and there is an element of give-and-take between principal and agent. Democracy level, on the other hand, is an underlying factor that does not directly influence an actor. Instead, the idea is that it shapes any (primarily national) principals, and the way they exert influence over the actor. This means that
domestic democracy level is not a perfect example of the classic principal commonly referred to in the literature, but rather an abstraction based upon the fundamental idea of the principal-agent approach, namely that there are factors influencing MEP voting behaviour. If successful, this study could perhaps even further the principal-agent framework.

Analysed on its own, domestic democracy level was shown to have a statistically significant correlation with MEP voting behaviour. However, the approximated R2 value was low, which meant that the model in question failed to explain a large amount of the variation in the data. When analysed against the EPG control variables, democracy level retained its statistical significance. This, along with the strong correlation between some EPGs and voting behaviour, indicates that both factors combined influence MEP voting conduct. This reaffirms the relevancy of the principal-agent approach put forward in existing research, which argues that MEP voting conduct is a product of the influence of at least two principals.

Some EPGs were so cohesive that they seemingly removed the correlation between individual MEP democracy level and their voting conduct – in the results presented above, they removed any statistical significance of the studied correlation. However, if one thinks of MEP democracy level as an explanatory factor to EPG alignment, the observed correlation does not necessarily have to undermine the main hypothesis of this paper. Moreover, the observed problem arises because when all members of a European Party Group votes in the same way, it removes any variation that the control variable could explain.

Throughout the course of this study, it has occurred to me that one can argue that democracy level is an explanatory factor to several different things. For instance, there the aforementioned possibility that one could imagine domestic democracy level to be an underlying factor explaining MEP European Party Group alignment. This whole idea is probably something that requires caution, or at least more specific control variables. The latter might enable statistical analysis of the different phenomena, which would be very useful in determining the relevance of democracy level in the various contexts discussed here. It is conceivable that there are different interaction effects at work here, so a deeper study of the correlation between democracy level and MEP voting conduct might find it worthwhile to investigate in that direction.

The point of the supporting hypothesis was to reinforce the notion that democracy level has a tangible correlation with MEP voting behaviour. Figure 4 above showed that in this non-legislative motion, there is a pattern to MEP disloyalty toward their EPG in relation to their democracy level, when it comes to the four highest and four lowest member states. MEPs from member states in the “Low” group were more likely to be disloyal in an authoritarian way, and vice versa.

The explanatory variable *domestic democracy level* has, throughout this study, been argued to be a more reliable and relevant way of gauging the correlation between MEPs nationality and their voting behaviour than the commonly used factor of their respective National Party Group. The causal model presented in Figure 1 shows democracy level as being an underlying factor explaining MEP
voting behaviour, with NPG influence playing a mediating role. In terms of the principal-agent approach, this can be interpreted as the effect of democracy level being channelled through NPG influence. However, the MEPs do not have to disclose their respective NPG party lines, which makes it necessary to use vague proxies for NPG influence. Moreover, if democracy level acts as an underlying factor explaining NPG influence on MEP voting conduct, this should make democracy level the more relevant variable to investigate.

In summation, the primary hypothesis is empirically supported by the data presented above. The domestic democracy level of MEPs was shown to have a correlation with their voting conduct at a 99% confidence level, both on its own and when the influence of the various EPGs was controlled for.

The supporting hypothesis also found empirical backing, as shown in Figure 4 above. The data showed that there is indeed a pattern to MEP loyalty toward their EPGs – MEPs with a relatively lower democracy level are more likely to be disloyal in order to vote in an authoritarian way, whereas MEPs with a high democracy level are more likely to be disloyal in a liberal fashion.

**Conclusion**

This paper set out to investigate the correlation between MEPs domestic democracy levels and their voting conduct in the European Parliament. The study was centred around two hypotheses – firstly, that MEP voting conduct in the European Parliament is affected by their respective domestic democracy level, and secondly, that domestic democracy level affects the way MEPs tend to be disloyal toward their respective European Party Groups. Both hypotheses were empirically supported by the data.

When it comes to the possibility of generalisation, the results of this study alone is not sufficient to make any broader claims. Primarily, this is because it is centred on a single issue – this means that one can only generalise the results to similar issues. In other words, this study can only make a claim for explaining the correlation between democracy level and MEP voting conduct on issues directly concerning democratic values. For such issues, however, the generalisability of the findings of this study should be high, for the same reasons the primary hypothesis in this study gained traction – domestic democracy level will have an impact on issues directly reflecting democratic values.

Domestic democracy level is arguably an underlying factor behind NPG influence on MEP voting conduct. Ideally, this correlation would have been controlled for in the statistical analysis. However, there are around 180 national delegations in the Parliament, which is far too many to investigate in a study based upon a single issue.
Further studies on this topic would do well to look into eventual interaction effects between for instance democracy level and BNP, and how they combine to affect MEP voting behaviour. Other angles of approach could be to compare how national delegations behave in different European institutions, in order to determine whether their conduct is affected by their domestic democracy level.

The European Union is currently facing a multitude of different challenges. The ongoing democracy problem is central to the very survival of the Union, and this study highlights but one way democratic regression can adversely affect the political process and international cooperation that stands at the heart of the European Union. It is made up of a vast web of institutions, further complicated by the varying agencies of its own member states. Hopefully, studies outlining the effect of varying democracy levels on the Union will spark the political courage necessary to light the flame of reform.
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