

# Party Supply Matters: an Alternative Explanation of Vote Switching and Differential Abstention in European Elections.

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Why in some European countries is vote switching in European elections almost the rule? Why in others is it the exception? Are European elections (still) playing the same second order national elections role equally across Europe?

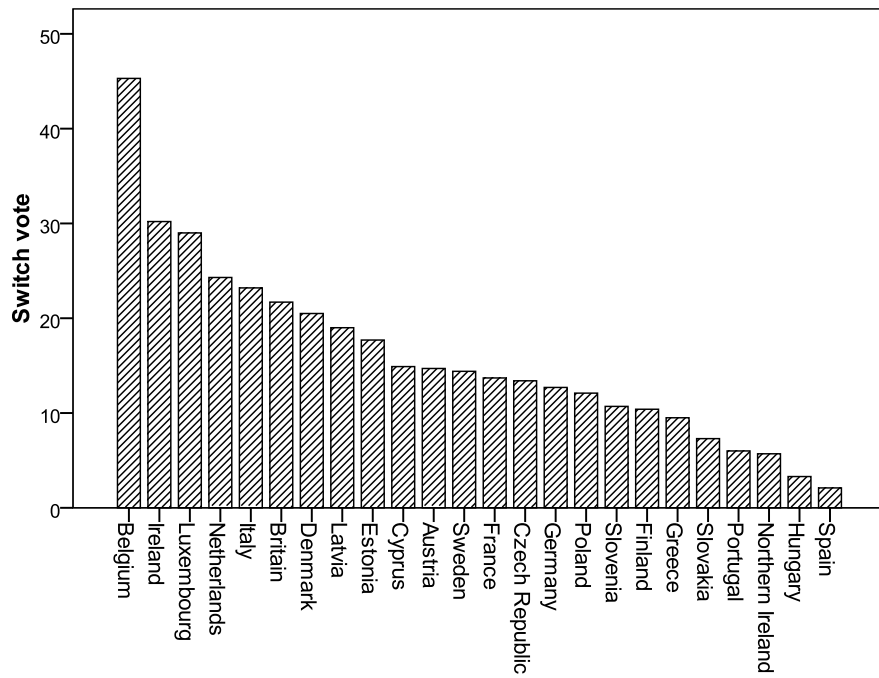
In this paper I maintain that European multilevel electoral complexity escapes the *demand side* perspective of traditional Second Order Election (SOE) theory by Reif and Schmitt (1980). Consequently, relevant variations in switch vote and differential abstention levels observed across Europe remain largely unexplained. To significantly advance in the understanding of European Union (EU) election results, I claim that the *party supply side* of the European electoral politics equation needs our theoretical and empirical attention.

Specific differences in election results between European and national elections have been traditionally explained by the so-called SOE theory. But recent studies have taken a more in-depth look into the micro-foundations of this multilevel electoral behaviour in Europe (Caruba & Timpone 2005; Marsh 2007; Weber 2007; Rohrschneider & Clark 2007; Hobolt et al. 2008, Schmitt et al. 2009). These micro explanations of switch vote are useful to know *how* individual electors cast their votes differently in different electoral arenas; but they tell us little (if anything) about *why* some European countries such as Belgium or the Netherlands show very high switch vote levels, (around 40 percent) while others such as Hungary or Spain show very low levels (around 5 percent).

And the same can be said of differential abstention. What explains the variability between Northern Ireland (60 percent) and Belgium (around 10 per cent)?

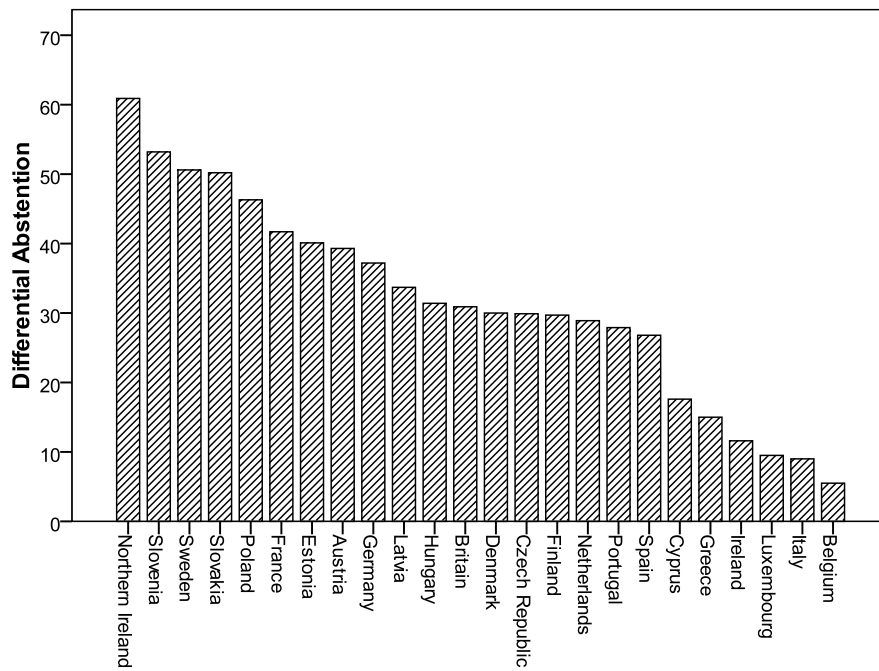
[Figure 1] National to European Elections switch vote distribution in 2004.

(Percentage points)



[Figure 2] National to European Elections differential abstention distribution in 2004.

(Percentage points)



Source: EES 2004

As mentioned above, I defend that the mechanisms implicit in SOE theory are not sufficient to account for the variations in switch vote and differential abstention seen across the EU. From the SOE perspective, the institutional differences among electoral arenas ('what is at stake') are the playground in which electors (the demand side) behave differently according to their sincere or strategic preferences. Given that this institutional playground is constant across EU countries, there is no way it could explain the observed differences among them. But even more importantly, SOE theory focuses almost exclusively on the *demand side* of the electoral politics equation (differentiated political behaviour in European Elections (EE) is due to sincere and/or strategic motivations in the electorate), holds the *institutional framework* constant, and overlooks the *political supply* side. It is in this area of the impact of political supply in EU electoral politics that this article aims to make its main contribution, both theoretically and empirically.

## **What is New**

This paper shows that the mechanisms proposed by traditional *demand side* SOE theory are conditional to country specific *party supply*. On the empirical side, it evidences that party supply is -by itself- a better predictor of switch vote and differential abstention than traditional *demand side* SOE theory factors. More importantly, the paper shows that the interplay between the *demand* and *supply* sides provides the best understanding of the electoral patterns of switch vote and differential abstention characteristics of EE. The paper also advances in conceptualization and measurement of the *effective party supply* by considering not only the Effective number of parliamentary parties (ENPP), but also the issue dimensionality of each political system.

## Party supply, market failures, and vote patterns in European Elections.

### *The party supply*

If we want to fully or better understand the electoral politics of switch vote and differential abstention in Europe, the *party supply* side requires our attention. Which factors determine the number of parties competing in each political system? What impact will this national party supply have on the electoral patterns of multilevel elections? Two broad approaches have been competing in answering the first question on party system fragmentation. The first is the *sociological* tradition mostly initiated by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). From this perspective we know that political competition in European countries has been structured along different cleavage dimensions such as class, religion or language. Among these cleavages, the socio-economic differences underlying the so-called left-right political scheme has been the main issue framing political competition in most Western Europe democracies (Rose and Urwin [1970], Lijphart [1981, 1984, 1999]); but not the only one. The higher the social heterogeneity and the greater the difficulties for alliances and coalitions at the time of party system formation, the greater the number of politicised cleavages will be at play, and more competing parties in a system. Adopting an empirical approach, Taagepera and Grofman (1985) showed that as a general rule, the effective number of parliamentary parties (ENPP) in a system could be expressed as a function of the number of issue dimensions<sup>1</sup> in that polity + one<sup>2</sup> ( $ENPP = I + 1$ ).

The second approach is the *institutional* tradition initiated by Duverger (1954), and culminated in some aspects by Cox (1997). This perspective has provided theoretical and empirical evidence on the restrictive role of electoral systems on party

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<sup>1</sup> There is wide variation in the terminology used in the dimensionality literature. While I would prefer the *ideological dimensions* used by Lijphart (1981), I will stick to *issue dimensions* coined by Lijphart (1984) and adopted by subsequent literature. A good discussion on the dimensionality terminology can be found in Kitchelt (2007). Recent empirical and theoretical developments in dimensionality measurement can be found in Nyblade (2004) Benoit and Laver (2006) and Stoll (2011).

<sup>2</sup> We can illustrate this general trend by means of two examples [data from Lijphart (1999)]. In Greece, where political competition evolves mainly around the socio-economic dimension, there are 2.20 NEP covering its political space. At the other extreme, in Finland, where political competition is organized not only around the socio-economic dimension, but also around the ethnic-cultural one and to a lesser extent the religious and urban-rural dimensions, there are 5.03 NEP covering its political space.

system fragmentation. It is well known that majoritarian electoral systems tend to reduce the number of competing parties in a polity to a much greater extent than proportional systems do. In his theoretically sound 1997 work, Cox defends that the number of viable candidates in any district should not exceed the district magnitude + one<sup>3</sup>. ( $N \leq M+1$ )

Far from being mutually exclusive, the sociological and institutional perspectives can be fruitfully related, both theoretically and empirically. Developments in the study of party system fragmentation (Ordeshook and Shvetsova, 1994; Amorim Neto and Cox, 1997; Clark and Golder, 2006; Geys, 2006; Stoll, 2011) and in the entry of new parties (Harmel and Robertson, 1985; Hug 2001; Hino 2006; Lago and Martínez, 2011) have shown an interaction between social heterogeneity and the restrictiveness of the electoral systems. While social and ethnic heterogeneity, social change and the upsurge of new social demands (and divides) create preconditions for the entry of new parties (and party system fragmentation), the restrictive strength of the electoral systems (among other factors) could act as a barrier to party entry into the system<sup>4</sup>. In Cox (1997) words:

“Social cleavages are free to determine the number of competitors below the  $[M+1]$  upper bound. It is only when the number of cleavages suggest a number of competitors than exceeds the upper bound that the electoral rules are constraining. Thus, systems may have few parties because there are few cleavages or because the upper bound is low; but systems should have many parties only when there are many cleavages combined with a permissive electoral system” Cox (1997, p274)

The upper bound on the number of parties -imposed by institutional mechanisms to sociological divides-, entails potential situations where social demands shared by a significant number of citizens could be left unaddressed. Induced by sociological and political-economic developments, new political demands may become salient; but because of entry barriers -such as electoral systems, mass media access or

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<sup>3</sup> A good review of the criticism received by both sociological and institutional approaches can be found in Amorim Neto and Cox (1999).

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that while the sociological perspective (i.e. Taagepera and Grofman, 1985) implies a point estimation of the number of parties necessary to address social demands in the form ( $ENPP = N + 1$ ), the refined institutional argument (Cox 1997) entails explicitly an upper bound, not a point estimation ( $N \leq M+1$ ).

party finance limitations- new challengers may keep away (Kitchelt 2007, p 539). Lago, Montero and Torcal (2007) and Lago and Martínez (2011) understand these situations as *electoral market failures*<sup>5</sup>. ‘Electoral market failures occur when a significant number of individuals are left dissatisfied by the partisan choices available to them.’ (Lago and Martínez, 2011, p7). A recent example of electoral market failure in the Catalanian regional party system has been reported by Lago, et al. (2007), giving pace to the entry of a new party after the 2006 regional elections.

In sum, as shown originally by the sociological approach, a direct association between the dimensionality of political space and the effective number of parties in a system can be empirically observed. As a general trend, party supply tends to overspill by one the number of issue dimensions in a polity. But this is not always the case. In a realistic multi-dimensional political space –and because of entry barriers or incomplete information at the elite level –the effective number of parties in a system can fall below the trend set by sociological factors, leaving some social groups unattended and leading to a degree of electoral market failure.

How will party supply affect electoral behaviour in EE? The answer will depend on which perspective of voting behaviour is adopted. In the next section I will discuss how changes in party supply may affect voting behaviour under the SOE theory perspective as well as under an issue voting perspective<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Cox (1997), and the in words of Lago and Martínez, ‘much like an economic market, elections can be seen as systems of exchange subject to equilibrating mechanisms’ (2011, p7) where ‘the number and type of parties that voters are willing to vote for turns out to equal the number and type of parties that are willing and able to stand for election’ (Cox, 1997, p8). But in real systems –economic or political- equilibrium is a rare bird. Incomplete information (biased expectations) of candidates or electors (among other factors) may lead to coordination failures (Cox, 1997, p8).

<sup>6</sup> We will consider at least two general answers, conditional to our broad view on how electoral choices are made. I will not enter into the debate on how electors transform their views and preferences into votes, nor the best empirical estimation of the so-called “vote formula”. It will suffice here to remember that for those following the Michigan School, vote is a function of strong Party Identification, which is formed through a process of socialization and habits, while for those following the so-called rational voter perspective, vote choices are formed to maximize policy preferences in an array of salient issues. As one could anticipate, from these two broad views opposite implications may be derived as to how a situation of rich vs. restricted party supply (amount of parties/amount of issue dimensions) should affect multi-level electoral choices.

## *Second order elections theory*

Second order election theory provides predictions of how national differences in electoral outcomes between National elections (NE) and European Elections (EE) should be (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). In EE, participation will be lower, big parties will lose and government parties' losses will be especially acute. These aggregate predictions are derived from two causal mechanisms, and their interaction.

The first broad institutional factor consists of the differences in what *is at stake* in NE and EE. With no real elective European executive, there is much less at play in EE. This leads to a lower turnout, and a lesser impact of the *strategic vote* than in NE; giving a clear advantage to small parties<sup>7</sup>.

The second mechanism is the impact of the *government popularity function* - associated with the national electoral cycle- on dissatisfaction among the electorate. This mechanism rests in the evolution of government popularity over the national electoral cycle (e.g. Tufte, 1975). According to this mechanism, government parties' popularity follows a cyclical pattern: a short period of post-electoral euphoria with even higher rates of popular approval, then a more or less drastic decline in popularity until mid-term, followed by an increase towards the end of the electoral cycle. Consequently, all other things being equal, the timing of EE with respect to NE will determine the level of dissatisfaction with the government party (Reif 1984; Reif 1997).

The interaction of the institutional factor (there is less at stake in EE) with the popularity function is at the core of the strategic mechanism in SOE. As a result of this interaction, at the time of EE, partisan voters identifying with a party in the national government may vote strategically by *signalling* –again at a low cost- their dissatisfaction with poor national government performance by voting for their second preference in EE. These signals can be issued in a harder or softer form. The harder version would be actual defection (national government voters signal their dissatisfaction by

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<sup>7</sup> There being much less at stake in EE would pave the way for some voters to choose their first-preference in EE (vote with the heart), even if the chosen party does not gain representation, and their second-preference in NE (vote with the head), because wasting their vote would be more costly in the currency of political consequences.

supporting another party); the softer version would be differential abstention (national government voters signal their dissatisfaction by abstaining).

This *demand side* explanation of Switch Vote (and, by extension, of differential abstention) rests upon the Michigan School tradition (e.g. Schmitt et al. 2009).

From this perspective, vote decision is mainly due to party identification and partisanship, which is formed through socialization and habit; but it leaves room for temporary *deviations* from the normal vote (Converse 1966) due to short term factors <sup>8</sup>.

### *Gap in the literature*

In this and the next sections I will present the main argument of this paper. I claim that if SOE theory wants to fully account for switch vote and differential abstention in a comparative multilevel electoral context, it should take into account the party supply side of the electoral politics equation.

Within the classic volume “Choosing Europe” edited by Cees van der Eijk and Mark Franklin (1996), Franklin, Oppenhuis and van der Eijk (1996), and van der Eijk, Franklin and Oppenhuis (1996) made an effort to assess the impact of contextual factors on EE turnout and on party preference. Those studies considered a great number of contextual factors as potential conditioners of electoral behaviour in EE, but were unable to detect a significant role of national party supply<sup>9</sup>. More recently, Kroh, van de Brug and van der Eijk (2007) showed that, at the time of European elections, the greater ENPP is in national parliaments, the lower the utility differential between first and second individual party preferences (easing the way for potential defections). Another work studying “persistent pull” and vote stability in EE (Toka and Gosselin 2010) established that long-term vote factors are inversely related to

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<sup>8</sup> According to Philip Converse (1966), while in the long run electors tend to vote for their most preferred party, under the influence of short term factors (such as candidate characteristics or poor performance), they may temporarily *deviate* from their central tendency *normal* vote.

<sup>9</sup> Those studies reported Compulsory voting, Sunday voting, electoral concurrency, proportionality, structural agreement (consensus among the electorate on party positions on L-R) and time since last national elections to be in some way related to turnout or party preference in EE.

switch vote, but offered inconclusive evidence on the potential role of party supply as a context control variable for vote switch and EE turnout<sup>10</sup>.

The lack of a clear empirical relationship between national party supply and the core dependent variables in SOE theory (i.e. vote switch and differential abstention) becomes puzzling; especially since other research programs have found it to be a key contextual factor for party choice. With regard the development of the *economic vote* tradition, some studies have shown an interaction between party supply and dissatisfaction with government performance affecting the vote (e.g. Anderson, 1995; Hellwig, 2001) <sup>11</sup>.

‘[...] economic effects are stronger when the effective number of parties is greater, foremost because of the increased set of viable choices available to citizens to express discontent [...]’ (Anderson 1995, p97).

### *The role of party supply in second order elections theory*

My argument is simple and straightforward. The party supply available to a (potentially) dissatisfied elector will be critical for his electoral behaviour pattern in EE, respect to NE. In a scenario of dissatisfaction with national government performance (as depicted by SOE theory), the existence of a large party supply in the ideological vicinities of our elector’s most preferred party will ease a strategic defection in EE. On the contrary, in Philip Converse (1966) *normal vote* parlance, to switch to a *deviant* vote in EE will be -by far- more difficult if there is no other party in the ideological vicinities of the voter. Then, under scarce party supply, how could a partisan voter signal his dissatisfaction with *his* most preferred party performance? The answer is also simple: by abstaining –again at a low cost- in SOE.

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<sup>10</sup> The results of Toka and Gosselin (2010) on the role of party supply were inconclusive. Initially they showed statistical independence of switch vote and EE abstention from party supply, but unexpectedly these results seemed to reverse when switch vote and EE abstention were chunked together in a new dependent variable called “defection”.

<sup>11</sup> Similar arguments linking abundant party supply to single level elections volatility have been presented by Pedersen (1983). Others, such as Crewe (1985) and Bartolini & Mair (1990) for Western Europe, and Birch (2001) for Eastern Europe, have confirmed a direct relationship between party system fragmentation and volatility.

It is worth noting that for SOE theory, abstention *vs.* defection in EE are just the weak and strong forms of signalling discontent (Schmitt et al. 2009); the strength of these signals being proportional to (demand side) dissatisfaction levels. But, on the contrary, by taking into account the supply side of electoral politics in multilevel competition, we are *qualifying* the outcome of the strategic signalling mechanism proposed initially by SOE theory. The contribution of this research to SOE theory would be to highlight the characteristics of party supply (rich *vs.* scarce) that condition the way disappointed electors signal their dissatisfaction: a) by abstaining, under scarce party supply; b) by defecting to another option in the case of abundant party supply.

The argument presented above is set on the assumption of a simplified single dimension political space. But in order to expand this model to a more realistic European multidimensional political scenario -and proceed in a comparative manner-, I will introduce the notion of *effective party supply*. This notion takes into account the country specific variation in issue dimensionality for the estimation of the *effective* party supply available to the electorate. I will illustrate the impact of dimensionality on party supply with two polar examples. In a socially homogeneous polity, where only one issue dimension is relevant (e.g. Left – Right socio-economic dimension), 3 ENPP will constitute an abundant party supply. In such a case, exceeding by 2 the Taagepera and Groffman (1985)  $i+1$  estimation, electors will have access to several viable party alternatives within the boundaries of their ideological camp. On the contrary, in a highly heterogeneous society with 3 cross cutting issue dimensions (eg. Left-Right, religious and ethno-nationalist) the same 3 ENPP would constitute a scarce party supply. Falling well below the  $i+1$  estimation, there will be several uninhabited political spaces with groups of electors potentially unaddressed.

Therefore, in order to capture the *effective* party supply available to the electorate we should also take into account the number of issue dimensions along which parties will spread. The simple division of the ENPP by the number of issue dimensions in a polity provides a neat estimation of the party supply *effectively* available to the electorate. A high ENPP/number of issues ratio (i.e. many parties for few issue dimensions) will

constitute an abundant *effective party supply*. A low ENPP/number of issues ratio (i.e. few parties for many issue dimensions) will constitute scarce *effective party supply*<sup>12</sup>.

As specific examples within Western Europe, we can find a low effective party supply in the case of Spain. According to Lijphart (1999), Spain's political space is structured around socio-economic, ethno-nationalist and, to lesser extent, religious dimensions. These 2.5 issue dimensions are scarcely covered by 2.5 ENPP, rendering an *effective party supply* of 1 (and potential situations of electoral market failures). At the other extreme we find Ireland, where 3.8 ENPP will account for a political space organised mostly around the socio-economic dimension (1.5 issue dimensions), producing a high effective party supply of 2.5.

Once we have a comparable measure of the party supply we can move into the empirical consequences of the argument presented.

If the strategic signalling mechanism proposed originally by SOE theory (only the demand side) is at play, it should be observed that:

*H1. The greater the proportion of electors unsatisfied with the national government's record in a country, the greater the levels of Differential Abstention, and even greater levels of Switch Vote.*

But, if it is true that the party supply side is playing a role by itself in the levels of Switch Vote and Differential Abstention in Europe, then it should be observed that:

*H2. The greater the effective party supply in a country (i.e. many parties, few dimensions), the greater the levels of Switch Vote in EE.*

And this logic runs opposite in the case of differential abstention:

*H3. The lower the effective party supply in a country (i.e. few parties, many issue dimensions), the greater the levels of Differential Abstention in EE.*

But, if it is true that the role of party supply is that of conditioning the strategic signalling mechanism proposed by (demand side) SOE theory, then it should be observed that:

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<sup>12</sup> A party system with a low effective party supply is a potential scenario for *electoral market failure*, see Lago et al. (2007) and Lago and Martinez (2011).

*H4.1. Under high effective party supply conditions (i.e. many parties, few issue dimensions), the greater the proportion of electors dissatisfied with the national government's record in a country, the greater the levels of Switch Vote.*

And

*H4.2. Under low effective party supply conditions (i.e. few parties, many issue dimensions), the greater the proportion of electors dissatisfied with the national government's record in a country, the greater the levels of Differential Abstention.*

### *Issue voting and party supply*

If we move from SOE theory to an issue or policy oriented vote perspective, electors will make their electoral decision based mainly upon their policy preferences, not necessarily on their party attachments (Kedar 2010). How will changes in party supply affect Switch Vote levels of issue oriented voters?

I will illustrate by means of an example how a scenario of low effective party supply (or market failure) could affect issue voting in a multilevel context. Let X be a European democracy where political competition is structured along two issue dimensions, the first (and most relevant) being the socio-economic left-right (L-R) scheme, and the second, an ethno-nationalist conflict, with Centralism vs. Regionalism as its poles. Let country X's party system have 2.5 ENPP. Two of them are major parties, the first being on the left and the second on the right side of the L-R scheme. Both major parties hold moderate positions in the ethno-nationalist dimension. And let there be a third smaller party placed (under low saliency) on the centre-left of L-R scheme but holding a strong (and salient) regionalist position in the ethno-nationalist dimension. This example illustrates a situation of market failure (with low effective party supply), where there are not enough parties to cover the political space, leaving part of the electorate unaddressed. If we pay attention to the demand side, a conservative and regionalist elector (Elector 1) will not find in country X's political market a single party fulfilling his political preferences in both the L-R and ethno-nationalist dimensions.

From an issue (or policy) oriented perspective Elector 1 may solve the menu restriction dilemma by switching his vote between two different parties in NE and EE. Each of these two choices would reflect his preferences in each of the relevant issue dimensions. As issue dimensions can be ranked in terms of their relevance (Benoit and Laver 2006), electors could use more important (national) elections to vote on more relevant issues, and less relevant (European) elections to vote on less relevant issues. In our example, Elector 1 could decide his vote in NE on his L-R policy preferences (voting for the conservative party) while voting in EE according to his ethno-nationalism positions (voting for the small regionalist party). This rationale builds on part of the mechanisms identified in the *dual voting* framework, proposed to account for differences in regional and national elections in Spain (Fernández Albertos, 2002; Montero and Font, 1991; Padró-Solanet and Colomer, 1992; Pallarés and Font, 1995; Pérez-Nievas and Fraile, 2000; and Riba, 2000).

Then, if it is true that this mechanism, derived from an issue oriented voter perspective, is at play: at least it should be observed that (opposite to H2):

*H5. The lower the effective party supply in a country (i.e. many issue dimensions, few parties), the greater the levels of Switch Vote and Differential Abstention in EE.*

## **Data and Analysis Strategy**

In order to test the aforementioned hypotheses, I will use national party systems data and country aggregated survey data from the 2004 European Election Study (EES)<sup>13</sup>. I will describe first the independent variables.

To model party supply, I use the national parliament values of ENPP (Laakso and Taagepera [1979]) in previous national elections, and the number of issue dimensions, as provided by Lijphart (1999) for Western Europe and by Whitefield (2002) for post-communist Eastern democracies. I calculate the effective party supply

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<sup>13</sup> This study comprises 26 representative mass surveys carried out after the European Parliament election of June 2004, in 24 member countries of the European Union. While Malta is the only member country that was not covered in this study, there are two countries with more than one representative survey: Belgium (both a Flemish and a Wallon sample of voters were interviewed) and the United Kingdom (with two separate studies, one for Great Britain and one for Northern Ireland).

for a country as the division of ENPP by the number of issue dimensions. As an indication of dissatisfaction with national government performance, I have calculated country percentages of electors disapproving the national government's record from EES 2004 data<sup>14</sup>. I will model the interplay between supply and demand sides with the product of *effective party supply* times *dissatisfaction* with national government performance. Finally, in the cases when some of the effects of the supply or demand side factors run in opposite directions -and the estimation of their interplay is relevant-, I will use a reversed version of the effective party supply indicator: the *low effective party supply* indicator. Consequently, a situation of dissatisfaction in conditions of low party supply will be modelled with the product of *low effective party supply* times *dissatisfaction* with national government performance<sup>15</sup>.

There are two dependent variables in this paper. The first is the country percentage of electors switching vote in EE. The second is the percentage of those voting in NE but abstaining EE. These individual level vote patterns (switching and abstaining in EU only) were carefully established upon national and European vote recall data from the 2004 EES, in each of the 24 countries in the study<sup>16</sup>. Figures 1 and 2 show their variation in Europe, while Table 1 shows the distribution of different vote patterns. Stable voters – much as expected – are the strongest category (34 percent), followed by differential (24 percent) and consistent abstainers (22 percent). Those reporting different choices in each election arena are a rather small group (14 percent); only the somehow ‘accidental’ EE voters who abstained in the preceding NE are less (6 percent). Stable voting and defecting is considerably less frequent in the new Eastern member countries, while differential and particularly consistent abstention is much

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<sup>14</sup> The question wording is as follows: “Let us now come back to [country]. Do you approve or disapprove the government's record to date?”

<sup>15</sup> To calculate the “low party supply” indicator (a situation of electoral market failure), I divide the number of issue dimensions by the ENPP. As a result, “low effective party supply” is equivalent to a reversion in the sense of the “effective party supply” indicator.

<sup>16</sup> These data were provided by Schmitt et al. (2009). The coding procedure accounted for an additional complication regarding the determination of inter-election vote patterns. It originates in the fluidity of party systems, which is particularly aggravated in the young democracies of Eastern Europe. The problem arises when choice options in one election are no longer available in the next because in-between times parties have split or merged or simply disappeared. In order not to overestimate the number of switch voters, great care has been taken to identify the political origins of new parties and to code respondents as stable voters whose present vote for a new party goes along with a previous vote for one of the constituent parts of it. I wish to acknowledge the help of the national study directors of the 2004 European Election Study in this process. Without their expertise and support, determining inter-election vote patterns could never be as accurately done as Schmitt et al. (2009) believe it was.

more common there. The variation in these patterns across Europe (Figures 1 and 2) is what I wish to analyse in this article.

[Table 1] Voting Behaviour in National Elections and Subsequent European Parliament Elections (figures in percentages)

	West	East	all EU
Chose the same party in both elections	36	20	34
Chose a different party in one election	15	10	14
Did not vote in EE but did in NE	23	29	24
Did not vote in NE but did in EE	6	7	6
Did not vote in either election	20	34	22
Weighted number of cases	24189	4454	28644

*Source:* European Election Study 2004. Weighted data are reported. The effect of the weighting is that national sample sizes are adjusted to the relative contribution of national populations to EU citizenry. Lithuania and Malta are not included in this calculation because of missing data.

I will test the hypotheses presented above using simple ordinary least squares regressions. The main reason for this is the restricted number of observations characteristic of country level comparative designs. Notwithstanding, this research is analysing the complete population of EU countries, and consequently the meaning of statistical significance is not as critical as in sample based research. In our case, differences between groups (or associations among variables) (significant or not) are “what they are” in the EU countries population. Using simple linear regression for data analysis will allow for a direct graphic presentation of both actual data and estimated association trends.

The hypotheses will be tested separately for the West and the East of the European Union since previous analyses of aggregate data have suggested that new democracies in Eastern Europe are not following SOE theory patterns (e.g. Schmitt 2005). Voter-party alignments and party systems are much less institutionalised and more fluid in the new post-communist democracies (Tavits, 2005, Rose and Munro, 2009:43-ff), which cannot but affect the reasoning that leads to selective abstention and vote switching in a different way than it does in the more consolidated political

systems of Western Europe. I expect therefore that my hypotheses will fare differently in the “old” EU 15 and in the new member countries.

Finally, I will not include in the general analysis the cases of Belgium and Luxembourg. The existence of an [enforced] compulsory voting rule (Belgium) and the concurrency of national and European elections (Luxembourg) are factors that specifically condition these two cases. A full research programme (from Powell 1982 and Jackman 1987 to Blais and Dobrzynska 1998) has established the clear impact of compulsory voting on cross-national turnout increases. If abstaining in EU elections is not a (legal) option, the only remaining channel to signal dissatisfaction would be to switch vote. This could explain why Belgium is the country showing maximum levels of switch vote (more than 45 percent) and minimum levels of differential abstention (below 10 percent) (see Figures 1 and 2)<sup>17</sup>.

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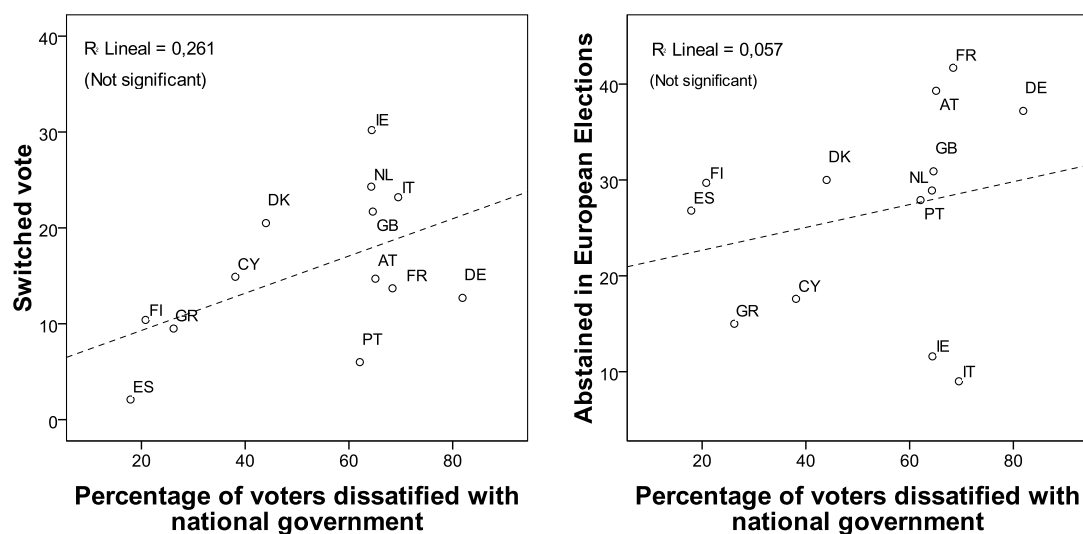
<sup>17</sup> And a similar argument applies to the case of concurrent national elections. If concurrency with national elections fosters turnout, the levels of differential abstention will be biased downwards.

## Analysis and results

The analysis provides different support for the three considered theoretical perspectives (SOE demand side, supply side, and issue voting) in Western European countries, and some unexpected findings in Eastern Europe. We will attend first to Western democracies then to the young Eastern democracies.

In Western Europe, demand side dissatisfaction with the national government's record (H1) is weakly (non-significantly) related to switch vote and differential abstention (Figures 3a and 3b). An increase in one percentage point of unsatisfied electors increases switch vote by 0.19 percentage points and differential abstention by 0.12. Explained variance in switch vote is limited (0.26) and very low (0.06) in the case of differential abstention. These results suggest a minor -or partial- role of the traditional strategic signalling mechanism from traditional SOE theory, by itself.

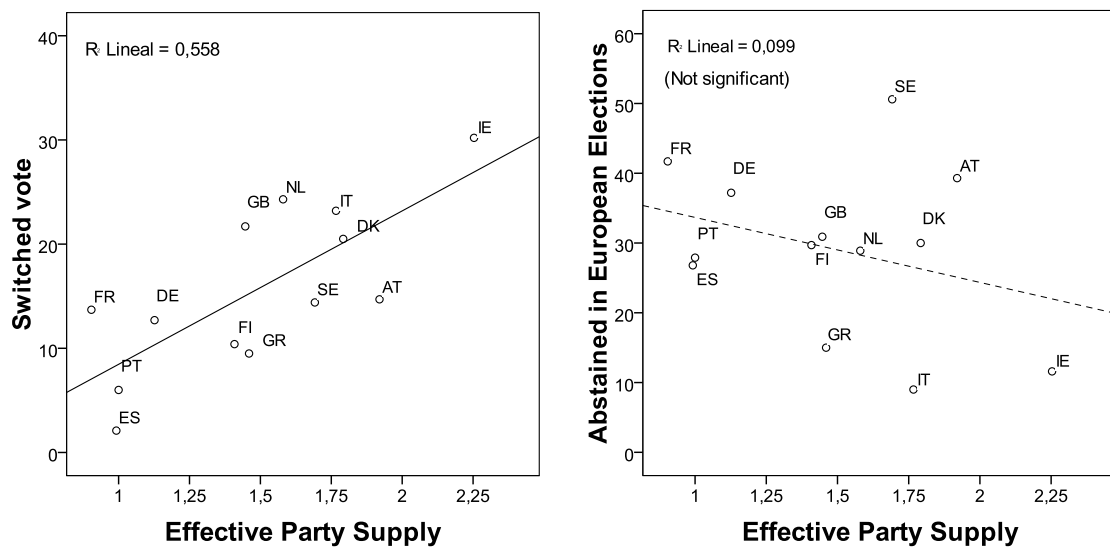
[Figures 3a and 3b Western Europe]



With regard the *supply side* perspective, high effective party supply levels are direct and strongly related to switch vote (Figure 4a) and inversely related (while not reaching significance levels) to differential abstention levels (Figure 4b). The observed variation in effective party supply in Western democracies can be associated with up to 56 percent of the variation in switch vote levels. And while differential abstention decreases (as expected) with the increase in effective party supply, only 10 percent of its variation can be associated with this factor. These results evidence the central role

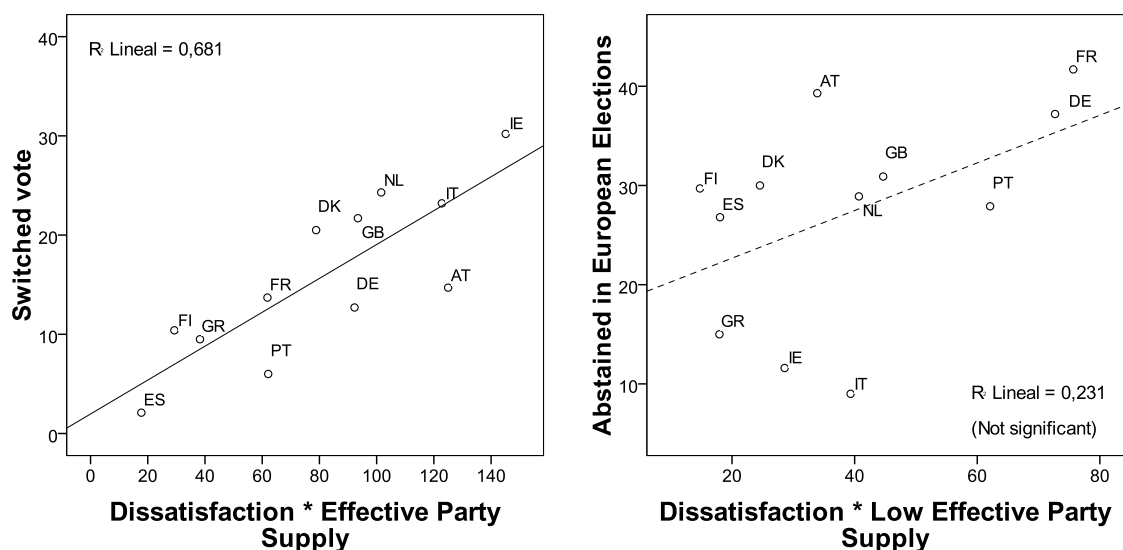
played by a large effective party supply in switch vote and, consequently, reject the predictions from an issue oriented switch vote perspective (based upon the existence of market failures). Favouring H2 (and contrary to H5) predictions, in countries with many issue dimensions and few parties covering them, switch vote is significantly lower than in those with a high party/issues ratio. These results are compatible with a party based vote decision (which requires many parties and few issue dimensions) and are at odds with an issue oriented switch vote perspective (requiring many issue dimensions and few parties).

[Figures 4a and 4b Western Europe]



When we attend to the interplay between supply and demand sides (H4.1 and H4.2), the interaction of dissatisfaction, times and effective party supply is direct and strongly related to switch vote levels (Figure 5a). However, according to the theoretical predictions, when we focus on differential abstention, dissatisfaction, times and low party supply lead to (almost significant) higher levels of differential abstention. (Figure 5b). In the first case, 68 percent of the switch vote variations in Western Europe can be explained by the interplay of party supply and citizen evaluations. In the second, 23 percent of observed variation in differential abstention can be explained by supply and demand side interplay.

[Figures 5a and 5b Western Europe]

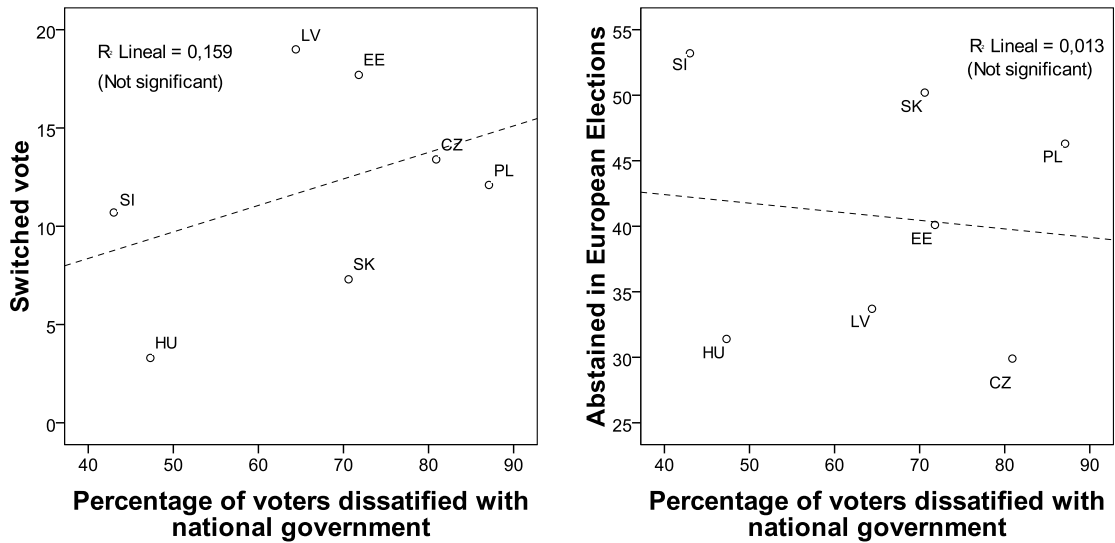


These results are fully compatible with the central claim in this paper that under conditions of a rich party supply, dissatisfaction with national government is channelled through higher levels of switch vote; in the absence of such party supply, the same dissatisfaction renders into EE specific abstention.

Data from Eastern Europe confirm many of the patterns we have seen in Western Europe, but also provide unexpected results in terms of electoral participation patterns.

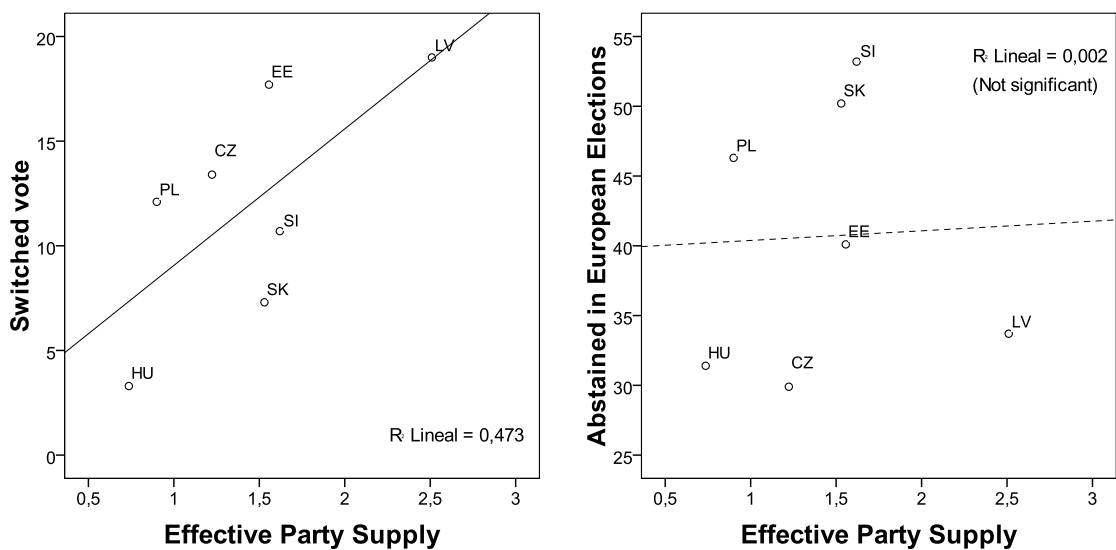
As in the West, dissatisfaction is directly -but non-significantly- related to switch vote, and in the direction predicted by H1 (Figure 6a). However, dissatisfaction is unrelated (or slightly inversely related) to differential abstention (Figure 6b).

[Figures 6a and 6b Eastern Europe]



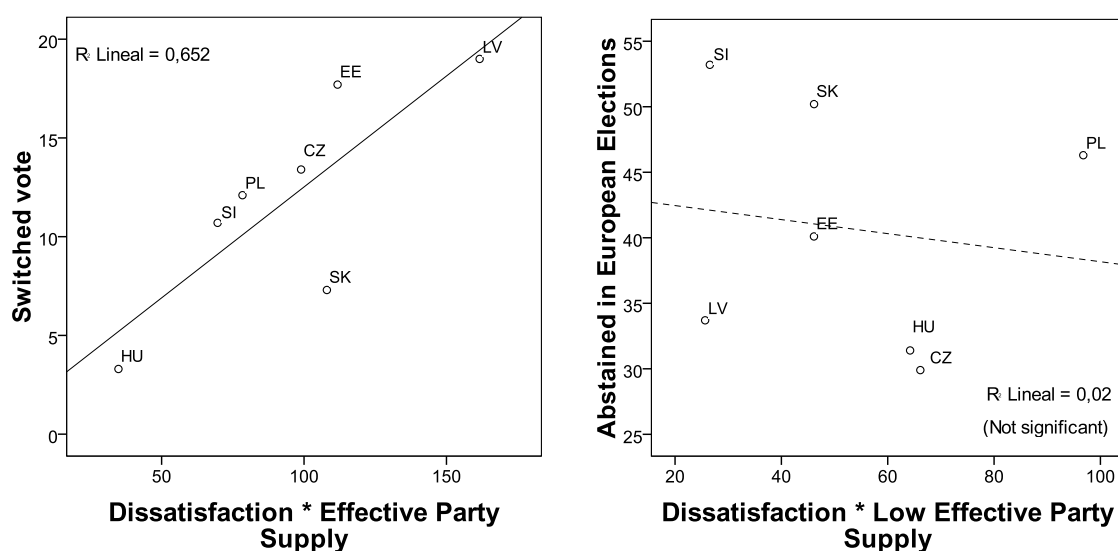
From the supply side perspective (H2, H3 and H5), effective party supply (affluence of parties with respect to issue dimensions) is directly and strongly related to switch vote (Figure 7a). Similarly to the West, the observed variation in the parties/issues ratio in Eastern Europe party systems can explain up to 47 percent of the switch vote levels. Again, contrary to the predictions of H3, in the East, rich party supply is unrelated to differential abstention (Figure 7b).

[Figures 7a and 7b Eastern Europe]



Let's consider finally, the interplay between supply and demand sides in Eastern Europe. According to H4.1 predictions, under high effective party supply conditions (many parties, few issue dimensions) dissatisfaction with the government record is direct and strongly related to switch vote levels (Figure 8a), in this case the explained variance in the switch vote rises to 65 percent. But once more, specific EU abstention levels in the new Eastern European democracies remain unrelated to the factors proposed by both the supply and demand side perspectives (Figure 8b).

[Figures 8a and 8b **Eastern Europe**]



Why does specific EU abstention in new Eastern European democracies appear to be unrelated to the factors proposed by both the supply and demand perspectives?

The explanation may have to do with the high levels of political detachment found in post-communist democracies (e.g. Rose and Munro 2009: 34-57). For SOE theory, lower participation rates in EE are a function of the existence of significant numbers of national election voters willing to signal dissatisfaction with their national government, at a low cost. But in young Eastern democracies participation in EE is substantially lower than in Western democracies. According to Rose (2004) data, while in Western Europe turnout in the 2004 EE was 75 percent, in Eastern countries it was 40 percent. In the EU, new members abstaining in EE is the norm and participation the exception. In this case, dissatisfied Eastern voters may employ alternative and stronger ways to signal discontent. This stronger signal could take the form of

complete detachment from the political system, by abstaining *also* in national elections. This political alienation rationale may explain why no relationship was found in Tables 6b, 7b and 8b. If dissatisfaction is leading to voters abstaining both in national and European elections, it will be unrelated (or even inversely related) to specific EE abstention (Figure 6b). If SOE theory assumes a *fixed* medium-high national election mobilization and *variable* medium-low European elections turnout (contingent to strategic signalling), this is not the case for Eastern European countries (Rose 2004, Rose and Munro 2009: 18). In new Eastern democracies, the *fixed* point would be an almost *constant* high abstention in EE and *variable* participation in national elections; which would be contingent to the forces studied in this paper (i.e. party supply, government dissatisfaction and their interplay). In this context, a high party supply would favour mobilization in national elections, but would not be strong enough to move citizens to participate in the distant European ballot box. This rationale would explain the unexpected results from Graphs 6b, 7b, and 8b<sup>18</sup>.

But any *ad-hoc* interpretation requires further testable implications. If the proposed European alienation mechanism is framing the way dissatisfaction and party supply affect vote patterns in young Eastern democracies, it should be observed in the East, and not in the West, that<sup>19</sup>:

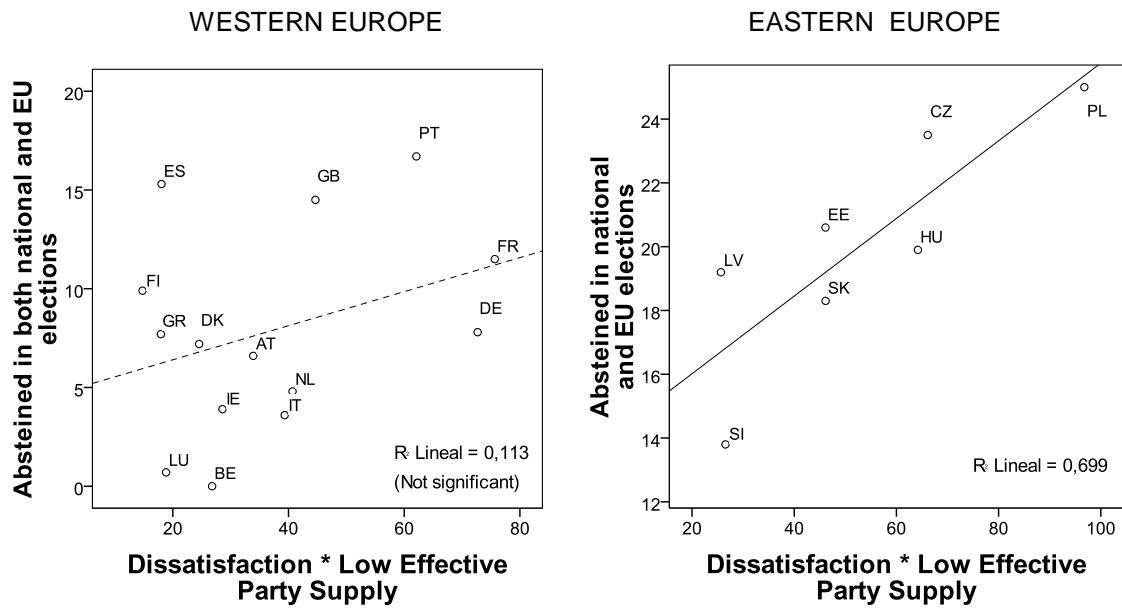
*H6. Under low effective party supply conditions (i.e. few parties, many issue dimensions), the greater the proportion of electors dissatisfied with national government performance in a country, the higher the levels of Abstention, both in national and European elections.*

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<sup>18</sup> However, this rationale runs opposite to the empirical regularities found in established democracies where higher party supply is directly (and paradoxically) associated to lower turnout levels (Jackman, 1987, Blais and Carty 1990, Jackman and Miller 1995, Blais and Dobrzynska 1998, Radcliff and Davis 2000). But it could be in line with evidence from developing democracies in Latin America, where no clear relationship was found between party supply and turnout (Pérez-Liñán ,2001; Fornos, Power and Garand, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> For reasons of space and simplicity, I enunciate a combined supply\*demand hypothesis. Results are equivalent when supply and demand factors are studied separately in an additive manner.

[Figures 9a and 9b]



The results confirm H6 predictions for the East, and reject them for the West. While in Western Europe (Figure 9a) country specific complete demobilization levels are unrelated to dissatisfaction with national government performance, in young Eastern democracies isolation from national and European ballot boxes is strongly related to high country specific dissatisfaction levels under low party supply conditions. The interaction of dissatisfaction with a restricted party supply can explain up to 70 percent of the electoral detachment (NE and EE) variations across Eastern European Union democracies (Figure 9b).

## Conclusion

The results presented in this article confirm the centrality of national party supply in voting behaviour patterns in EE. As an independent factor on switch vote and differential abstention, party supply has shown to be a better predictor than traditional demand side discontent with national government performance. A richer party supply appears to be strongly and directly related to increasing levels of switch vote. This tendency rejects the predictions from issue oriented explanations of switch

vote, in favour of a party based multilevel vote decision. But more importantly, party supply appears to be a strong frame for SOE theory mechanisms. Under an abundant party supply, dissatisfaction with national government performance leads to increasing levels of switch vote, while under a restricted party supply dissatisfaction leads to EE demobilization. In the case of Eastern Europe countries, this demobilization turns into a complete alienation from the political system, by abstaining both in national and European Elections. As a consequence, abstention and defection in EE can no longer be understood as the weak and strong forms of signalling discontent, as held in the traditional SOE perspective (Schmitt et al. 2009). On the contrary, abstention and defection appear now as -context sensitive- different responses to dissatisfaction with national government. By taking into account the party supply side of the electoral politics equation, we are *qualifying* the outcome of the strategic mechanism proposed originally by SOE theory.

“Still second order?” (Schmitt, 2005)? If more than half the variability in characteristic EE electoral patterns can be linked to dissatisfaction with national factors, under a strong frame from national party supply; then the answer is again “Yes, 25 second order *national* elections”.

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