

THE MANDATE FUNCTION OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS

The relevance of election pledges to the powers of the
European Parliament

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Abstract

Election campaigns for the European Parliament (EP) often concern issues that reach beyond the powers of the EP and extend into the domain of broader (EU)- or national issues. A key part of these campaigns are election pledges which lay out how a party intends to act if elected, enabling voters to give a mandate to carry out these plans. For this mechanism to function, a sufficient portion of pledges must fall within the EP's competences. The aim of this study was therefore, using the 2014 European election manifestos of Dutch parties as a sample, to determine to what extent EP election pledges are relevant to the EP's powers and what these findings imply about the mandate function of the elections. This was done by research into the formal and informal powers of the EP and the extraction of testable pledges from election manifestos. The pledges were categorised by their (policy) areas and associated EP powers in order to determine the EP's impact on decision-making about these pledges. The results of this study were in line with previous research that show that EP election campaigns typically place limited attention on issues that are directly relevant for the EP. The study found that, on average, as much as 48% of pledges were too imprecise or subjective to be fulfillable by the EP, 22% of pledges fell within policy areas where the EP has insignificant formal powers or would be forced to rely on influence to affect outcomes, while the remaining 30% of pledges fell within policy areas where the EP has decisive impact on decision-making. This means that the potential maximum pledge fulfilment lies between 30% and 52%. As the creation of a mandate requires a strong pledge-output link, it can be said that these elections failed to create a mandate because they fail to express the will of the voters in the policy areas where the EP has competence.

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1. Introduction

Dutch political parties tend to use campaigns for national parliament elections to discuss national issues and campaigns for European Parliament (EP) elections to discuss both European Union (EU)- and national issues¹. To a certain extent this appears to be a logical separation, but due to the distribution of the EU's decision-making competences, the situation is more complicated in practice. Some EU decisions are made solely by representatives resulting from national parliament elections, others by representatives elected through EP elections and yet others by representatives appointed by representatives resulting from national parliament elections. However, the vast majority of decisions are taken by a combination of all of these. Contrasting the seemingly common and oversimplified separation of EU- and national issues with the complexity of EU decision-making, makes it conceivable that parties are carrying out EP-election campaigns based around manifestos that to some extent lack relevance to the EP, simply because the decision-making competence belongs to a different institution or level of governance².

This level of relevance is of interest, as the EP is the main link between citizens and the EU institutions³ and is one of the primary sources of democratic legitimacy for the whole European project⁴. This citizen-EU link is reliant on strong relationships between pledges and subsequent actions and policy output, which is central to the mandate theory of democratic representation⁵, in which voters give parties a mandate to convert their preferences into policies. Representatives in the EP will be unable to fulfil pledges and produce the promised outcomes if these do not fall within the EP's powers. Instead, such pledges would by necessity have to be enacted outside of the EP's powers and by decision-makers other than Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). In that case, the pledge-to-output link would be missing and voters would not be able to give a mandate through these elections⁶. Similarly, this applies to pledges that are insufficiently precise to be implemented as policies as well as pledges where the EP lacks decisive formal powers and must rely on influence to affect outcomes. In both of these cases it would be wholly unclear to voters whether the party even has the theoretical ability to fulfil a specific pledge.

This study therefore aims to establish where parties' EP-election pledges fall in relation to the EP's impact on EU decision-making. This will produce findings that enable conclusions to be drawn about the mandate function of these elections. This will be done through a case study of the election manifestos of the nine Dutch parties elected in the 2014 EP elections, using the following research question:

Research question

To what extent did election pledges from the 2014 European manifestos of Dutch parties correspond with the decision-making powers of the European Parliament and what do these findings imply about the extent to which these elections can fulfil their mandate function?

Sub-questions

1. What were the powers of the European Parliament at the time of the 2014 elections?
2. What were the election pledges in the 2014 European manifestos of Dutch parties and how do these fit into the (policy) areas stipulated by EU treaties, agreements, statutes and other official documents?
3. How much of a decision-making impact do the EP's powers allow it to have on pledges from the 2014 European manifestos of Dutch parties?

¹ Vollaard, Voerman & van der Walle, as cited in Vollaard, 2013

² Van Keulen & Aalberts, 2019, p.13

³ Kratochvíl & Sychra, 2019, p.171

⁴ Hamrik & Kaniok, 2019, p.355

⁵ Downs; Klingemann, Hofferbert & Budge; Bingham Powell; McDonald & Budge as cited in Thomson et al., 2017

⁶ Mair & Thomassen, 2008, p.9

Structure

The remainder of the Introduction chapter contains sections on the differences between competences and formal and informal powers as these are what constitute the EP's decision-making ability and decide its place in the EU's institutional power balance. It also describes one of the concerns with EP elections: the lack of focus on issues relevant to the EP and its competences. Instead, there is excessive attention given to other matters such as national issues, national governments and European integration. This chapter also covers how parties use their manifestos internally and externally, and how the content of these manifestos reaches voters.

The Theoretical Framework chapter contains a description of mandate theory and how it applies differently to the EP than to traditional proportional or majoritarian systems. It also outlines the EP's role in the legislative process and other significant areas, such as budgeting and appointments. These powers are then categorised into a pledge coding scheme to be used for the assessment of the link between pledges and EP powers.

The Methods chapter goes into research strategy and design; data collection and analysis; as well as pledge extraction- and coding methods using findings from other manifesto analysis projects. It introduces the variable Guaranteed EP Impact to simplify the process of differentiating between pledges in areas where the EP has guaranteed, formal impact on decision-making and those areas where the impact is informal and uncertain.

This is followed by the Results chapter which contains the unitisation and coding results, several coding examples, and the Guaranteed EP Impact associated with the assessed manifesto pledges. The Conclusion contains the significant findings and their implications, limitations of the study and recommendations.

Power, influence and competence

The EP's decision-making ability comes from the formal powers given to it by treaties and agreements. However, as with any political decision-maker, the ability to fulfil pledges depends on more than just formal procedures. Situational constraints also make a key difference⁷. These are ever-changing, complex and often invisible to many actors. 'Power' is an oft-used term in this context, but it is a term that can be used in multiple ways. The EU treaties use the term 'competence' to speak of areas in which the EU is formally involved as a decision-maker, whereas the term 'power' is used when laying out how these competences are executed.

Power as a theoretical concept pertaining to political decision-making can itself be divided into formal and informal; where formal power is the ability to affect decision outcomes despite opposition from other actors⁸, while informal power, also referred to as influence, is the ability to affect decision outcomes with the cooperation of other, willing actors. The key distinction for the subject matter of this study is that formal power counts as impact on decision-making that is guaranteed and predictable, whereas informal power is impact that is uncertain and unpredictable. A practical example of this is that all MEPs have the same primary formal powers, whereas their informal power will vary widely. Likewise, in the European Council, the threat of a veto from a large Member State will typically be treated differently than the threat of a veto from a small Member State.

The impact of informal influence deserves close attention in the context of EU politics as it is an area that contains a high degree of informal politics⁹. Among other things, this means that it should be expected that the inter-institutional power balance is different in practice than what is set down in treaties¹⁰. Political capital¹¹, bargaining strength and other factors affect the powers of the institutions beyond the formal procedural rules of decision-making. In this way, the EP has been largely successful in enhancing its influence despite the limited authority given by the treaties, by using its political prominence to interpret gaps in the treaty to its own

⁷ Costello & Thomson, 2013, p.1026

⁸ Costello & Thomson, 2013, p.1036-1037

⁹ Christiansen & Neuhold, as cited in Roederer-Rynning & Greenwood, 2016, p.17

¹⁰ Costello & Thomson, 2013, p.1026

¹¹ Herranz-Surrallés, 2014, p.957

advantage¹², for instance, by positioning itself as a solution for the democratic deficit¹³. This enhanced influence is visible in the actions of the European Commission (henceforth: the Commission): it values the EP's political capital highly and may therefore take the EP's views into account regardless of its (lack of) formal role¹⁴. The EP also benefits from the increasingly common use of legislative packages (e.g. circular economy and digital internal market): negotiations that concern proposals that are explicitly linked to each other¹⁵. Such package deals can give the EP *de facto*, albeit informal, veto power¹⁶.

Despite these factors working in favour of the EP, the Council of the European Union (henceforth: the Council) still has the structural advantage over the EP in any legislative procedure that includes formal parity between the institutions¹⁷. There are a few key reasons for this. First of all, the Council has a bargaining advantage because it is often closer to the status quo than the EP, caused either by the Council's conservatism or the EP's radicalism¹⁸. Internal division is more of an issue for the EP than for the Council due to the required voting majorities¹⁹ and the fact that EP committee meetings and plenary debates are public²⁰, which the Council can use to its advantage. The reverse is not possible because Council meetings typically take place in private²¹. Lastly, the EP is at a disadvantage in terms of technical expertise and time compared to the other institutions²².

Characteristics of European Parliament elections

Elections to the EP are fundamentally different than elections to the Member States' national parliaments. For instance, EP elections and the resulting parliamentary majority do not decide the makeup of the executive²³ which means that voters do not have the ability to hold the EU's executive to account²⁴; at least not as directly as within a national system. This is a systemic difference that serves as a motivation for voters to vote differently than in national elections²⁵. It has also led some to suggest that the EU suffers from an accountability deficit²⁶ as EP elections have little at stake in terms of political alternatives²⁷.

This supposed accountability deficit is further exacerbated by the fact that once political parties are elected to the EP, it becomes difficult for voters to see what their parties stand for because most decisions in the EP are made before the public plenary voting stage. In addition, most parties will choose to enter into party groups and the largest of these, which represent a majority of the EP, tend to vote similarly most of the time²⁸ which gives the appearance of a single, unified decision-maker²⁹.

National focus

Another notable characteristic of the EP is that it is national parties that stand for election rather than European parties (with few and, as of yet, largely insignificant exceptions) which contribute to the national character of the

¹² Hix; Farrell & Héritier; Héritier, as cited in Rittberger, 2014, p.1177

¹³ Herranz-Surrallés, 2014, p.971

¹⁴ Rosén, 2016, p.417

¹⁵ Van Keulen & Aalberts, 2019, p.208

¹⁶ Kluger Dionigi & Koop, 2019, p.788

¹⁷ Costello & Thomson, 2013, p.1036-1037

¹⁸ Costello & Thomson, 2013, p.1037

¹⁹ Costello & Thomson, 2013, p.1028

²⁰ Corbett et al., as cited in Costello & Thomson, 2013, p.1028

²¹ Costello & Thomson, 2013, p.1037

²² Christiansen & Dobbels, 2013, p.1167

²³ Hobolt & Spoon, 2012, p.703; Weber, 2011, p.908

²⁴ Van der Brug & De Vreese, as cited in Gattermann & De Vreese, 2017, p.448; Føllesdal & Hix; Hobolt & Tilley, as cited in Gattermann & De Vreese, 2017, p.461

²⁵ Manow & Döring, 2008, p.1354

²⁶ Hobolt & Tilley, as cited in Gattermann & De Vreese, 2017, p.448

²⁷ Van der Brug & De Vreese, as cited in Gattermann & De Vreese, 2017, p.448

²⁸ OEIC, as cited in Kohler 2014, p.612

²⁹ Votewatch Europe, as cited in Kohler 2014, p.612

elections³⁰ and provide voters with an electoral connection based on national politicians³¹. EU-level parties do exist (most visibly exemplified by the party groups in the EP) but they have little relevance to voters in comparison to national parties³². Therefore, researchers have long considered that EP elections are influenced more by national politics than by EU-level political conflicts³³. The national rather than European focus³⁴ has led many scholars to describe EP elections as second-order national elections. This has become the dominant framework for analysing EP elections, with many empirical studies providing supporting evidence³⁵. At the heart of this description is the assertion that EP elections are clearly considered to be of lesser importance than first-order national parliamentary elections³⁶.

Evaluating national governments

Additionally, numerous studies have found that most voters use EP elections to evaluate³⁷ or punish their national governments³⁸. This is demonstrated through the greater success for opposition parties and radical parties in EP elections³⁹. For example, the two Dutch governing parties went from 51% of the votes in the national elections of 2012 to 21% in the EP elections of 2014.

A contributing factor to the poorer performance of governing parties is voters' opposition to further integration, for which incumbent governments are often seen as bearing the most responsibility⁴⁰. This is supported by the finding that voters are more likely to switch votes if they hold views that are more Eurosceptic than the party they voted for in the national election⁴¹. Simon Hix claims that these voting patterns create the norm of divided government in the EU: different compositions of the EP and the Council⁴² which affects the EP's ability to impact decision-making.

European issues and European integration

In coherence with this interpretation, a number of recent studies have found that some voters will indeed use European issues as a basis for their EP-vote⁴³. However, the problem is that even when parties, media and voters give attention to 'European issues', proposed by some as being the correct focus for EP elections, this typically means issues of European integration. Peter Mair and Jacques Thomassen describe this as a "fundamental misunderstanding" because these questions are decided at the national level, not the level that the elections pertain to⁴⁴. Evidently the term 'European issues' has multiple definitions and, understandably, in the public debate these issues are named after the domain (e.g. because Member States are seen as having a common interest) rather than by the level of governance that holds the decision-making competence. This is because knowledge about the finer details of EU decision-making, which is sometimes necessary to differentiate between EU- and national issues, is not widely present in the public.

Limited salience

Besides the systemic causes mentioned above, there is an interplay of party, voter and media choices which supports the national focus. These are mutually reinforcing factors, which makes it extremely difficult to

³⁰ Weber, 2011, p.908

³¹ Hix & Hagemann, as cited in Gattermann & De Vreese, 2017, p.448

³² Judge & Earnshaw; Faas; Hix; Hix & Lord, as cited in Lindberg et al., 2008, p.1108

³³ Reif & Schmitt, as cited in Hobolt & Wittrock, 2011, p.29

³⁴ Judge & Earnshaw; Faas; Hix; Hix & Lord, as cited in Lindberg et al., 2008, p.1108; Reif & Schmitt; Schmitt, as cited in Lindberg et al., 2008, p.1113; De Beus & Mak, as cited in Van Keulen & Aalberts, 2019, p.13

³⁵ Reif; van der Eijk & Franklin; Hix & Marsh, as cited in Hobolt & Wittrock, 2011, p.29

³⁶ Reif; van der Eijk & Franklin; Marsh, as cited in Hobolt & Wittrock, 2011, p.29

³⁷ Reif & Schmitt; Schmitt, as cited in Lindberg et al., 2008, p.1113

³⁸ Manow & Döring, 2008, p.1349

³⁹ Manow & Döring, 2008, p.1354

⁴⁰ Bartolini, as cited in Manow & Döring, 2008, p.1354

⁴¹ Hobolt, as cited in Spoon, 2012, p.560

⁴² Hix, as cited in Manow & Döring, 2008, p.1350

⁴³ Manow & Döring, 2008, p.1358; Clark & Rohrschneider; De Vries et al.; Hix & Marsh; Hobolt et al., as cited in Spoon, 2012, p.560

⁴⁴ Mair & Thomassen, 2008, p.9

differentiate between cause and effect. For example, it is unclear to which extent the media's national focus when covering EP campaigns⁴⁵ results from the emphases chosen in party communication, from the lack of salience of EU-matters for voters, or from the lack of salience of EU-matters for the media itself. For instance, the national focus which surrounds EP elections generally leads to parties choosing not to mobilise voters based on EU-issues and instead focusing on domestic issues⁴⁶. This has the effect of providing voters with less knowledge about European politics, which will contribute to their perception of EU-matters as being of lower salience⁴⁷ and leads them to rely largely on national politics⁴⁸.

Because of the focus on national issues and the fact that voters use the elections to pass judgment on their national government, it means that only some of the voters base their choice (primarily) on European issues, and an even smaller group base their choice (primarily) on issues relevant to the EP⁴⁹. This makes the impact, even indirect, of EP manifestos questionable⁵⁰. The link between party pledges made before the elections and subsequent policy proposals and outcomes would therefore be indirect, at best⁵¹.

Manifestos

This study uses manifestos as a source for pledges for EP elections. This choice is based on the notion that manifestos are meaningful documents used by parties as a basis for election campaigns and post-election actions. Although the contemporary view of manifestos as detailed policy documents⁵² justifies this type of use, historically they have been seen as documents not even taken seriously by their authors, consisting of nothing but pandering to public sentiment or policy statements that are vague enough to be meaningless⁵³. Manifestos were considered to “persuade no one, deceive no one, and enlighten no one”⁵⁴ and to be almost useless in terms of predicting a party's actions in office⁵⁵.

This view has developed remarkably in the positive direction, far enough that most researchers now find them to be of large importance to election campaigns⁵⁶ because they provide the most official overview⁵⁷ of a party's unified proposals⁵⁸ and have been shown to correspond with future actions by policy-makers⁵⁹. Furthermore, manifestos are highly correlated with, and therefore representative of, other types of communication such as speeches⁶⁰, media appearances and other types of party documents⁶¹.

The link between manifestos and future actions has been found in studies in a number of countries with different types of government⁶². Other studies have gone a step further and, by looking at outcomes, found that parties also (at least partially) fulfil their pledges. For instance, in the tested time periods, British government parties fulfilled around 70% of manifesto pledges; Irish government parties fulfilled 50% and Dutch government parties fulfilled 57%. Mansergh and Thomson consider this sufficient evidence to disprove the old claim that

⁴⁵ de Vreese et al.; Schuck et al., as cited in Hobolt & Wittrock, 2011, p.33

⁴⁶ Weber, 2011, p.908

⁴⁷ Hobolt & Wittrock, 2011, p.33

⁴⁸ Schmitt, as cited in Van Spanje & De Vreese, 2011, p.408

⁴⁹ Mair & Thomassen, 2008, p.8

⁵⁰ Van Keulen & Aalberts, 2019, p.14

⁵¹ Kostadinova & Giurcanu, 2019, p.1

⁵² Quinn, 2014, p.6

⁵³ Ostrogorski, as cited in Dolezal, Ennser-Jedenastik, Müller, Praprotnik & Winkler, 2018, p.241

⁵⁴ Schattschneider, as cited in Dolezal et al., 2018, p.241

⁵⁵ King, as cited in Royed, 1996, p.50

⁵⁶ Dolezal et al. (2012), as cited in Dolezal et al., 2018, p.241

⁵⁷ Costello & Thomson, 2008, p.241; Quinn; Klingemann et al., as cited in Däubler, 2012, p.51; Ormrod & Henneberg; Rölle, as cited in Håkansson & Naurin, 2016, p.396

⁵⁸ Lehmann & Zobel, 2018, p.1059

⁵⁹ Naurin; Artés; Thomson; Royed, as cited in Håkansson & Naurin, 2016, p.393; Dolezal et al., as cited in Dolezal et al., 2018, p.241

⁶⁰ Hofferbert & Budge, as cited in Bischof & Senniger, 2018, p.478

⁶¹ Costello & Thomson; Rose, as cited in Håkansson & Naurin, 2016, p.396

⁶² Artés & Bustos, 2008, p.329

parties do not act upon their election pledges once in government⁶³. It also shows that manifestos are highly relevant for the idea that parties derive policy mandates from elections⁶⁴; giving them the authority to pursue their proposed policies⁶⁵.

Functions

The functions of manifestos can largely be put into two categories: internal and external. Internally, manifestos are used for the projection of identity⁶⁶ and for providing structure for election campaigns and party representatives⁶⁷. They are used as a tool for coordinating and disciplining members⁶⁸, holding candidates accountable to the party line⁶⁹ and can contribute to keeping a party's internal fractions together⁷⁰. They also serve to guide or constrain political decision-makers which facilitates policy choices that are less erratic and short-term oriented⁷¹.

Externally, manifestos are used to project an image⁷² and are a key source for policies, preferences, and positions of political actors⁷³, as well as communication towards voters, media⁷⁴ and interest groups⁷⁵. In this external function, they can serve as a type of contract with voters containing verifiable pledges or can serve as something closer to advertising by the use of looser (potentially unverifiable) claims⁷⁶. Most commonly, they will be a combination of the two. They can also include references to the party's past behaviour, attacks on other parties⁷⁷ and signalling for coalition-building with other parties⁷⁸.

The external and, as a consequence, also the internal functions are hampered by the fact that voters generally do not read manifestos⁷⁹. Rather, their content tends to be communicated to voters indirectly⁸⁰. For example, parties may communicate it by other means in a summarised form⁸¹. Most of all, it reaches voters through media actors who often give significant attention to manifestos and specific pledges within⁸². This serves as one of the main sources of political information for voters⁸³. For instance, a study conducted in Austria and Germany found empirical evidence that pledges and positions from manifestos are actively debated in the media in these countries⁸⁴. Due to this indirect communication, Quinn asserts that it is less relevant whether voters actually read manifestos⁸⁵.

European Parliament manifestos

Studies with a focus on EP-manifestos have found that these typically contain party positions on a wide range of both national and EU-issues, often with an emphasis on national matters. For example, a study by Spoon found

⁶³ Mansergh & Thomson, 2007, p.324

⁶⁴ APSA; Rose; Bingham Powell; McDonald et al., as cited in Däubler, 2012, p.51

⁶⁵ Bingham Powell, as cited in Quinn, 2016

⁶⁶ Charlot, as cited in Harmel, Tan, Janda & Smith, 2018, p.279

⁶⁷ Eder et al., as cited in Bischof & Senniger, 2018, p.478

⁶⁸ Däubler, 2012, p.51; König & Luig, 2012, p.608

⁶⁹ Bischof & Senniger, 2018, p.478

⁷⁰ Håkansson & Naurin, 2016, p.394

⁷¹ Thomson et al, 2017, p.528

⁷² Harmel et al., 2018, p.278

⁷³ Costello & Thomson, 2008, p.241; Benoit, Laver & Mikhaylov, 2009, p.495; Dolezal et al., 2018, p.240

⁷⁴ Håkansson & Naurin, 2016, p.394

⁷⁵ Däubler, 2012, p.51

⁷⁶ Dolezal et al., 2018, p.242

⁷⁷ Dolezal et al., 2018, p.250

⁷⁸ König & Luig, 2012, p.608; Håkansson & Naurin, 2016, p.394

⁷⁹ Costello & Thomson, 2008, p.241; Moury, 2011, p.37; Däubler, 2012, p.53; Reher, 2014, p.163

⁸⁰ Braun & Popa, 2018, p.1140

⁸¹ Mair, as cited in Däubler, 2012, p.53

⁸² Krukones, as cited in Thomson et al, 2017, p.528

⁸³ Reher, 2014, p.163

⁸⁴ Bischof & Senniger, 2018, p.478

⁸⁵ Quinn, 2014, p.7

that the vast majority of content in manifestos from 14 Member States from the elections between 1979 and 2004 was unrelated to the EU. On average, only 21.7% of the content of these manifestos concerned EU-issues⁸⁶.

It is therefore even more notable that Wüst and Schmitt's study about the 1999 EP elections found that parties overemphasised EU-issues in relation to the voters, who were interested in unemployment above all other issues. This created a mismatch of focus which meant that voters were not fully receptive to political messages from the parties⁸⁷. The reverse also appears to be true: parties do not appear to be receptive to cues from the voters. Voter ambivalence has increased while parties' EU-issue salience has remained relatively stable, leading Wüst and Schmitt to conclude that parties are at least partially unresponsive to voters.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Mandate theory

The national focus of EP elections, if reflected in parties' election pledges, conceivably places limits on how much these pledges can actually be fulfilled by the EP. It therefore raises questions about the election's ability to create a mandate - an authorisation from voters for parties to pursue a set of policies on their behalf⁸⁸. The mandate concept has been described as "decisive evidence of democracy in action"⁸⁹ because it establishes a clear connection between citizens' preferences and government policy. It gives voters the prospect of influencing future policy or government action and gives politicians a justification for putting their election promises into practice⁹⁰. As a theoretical model, it is the most commonly used model of democratic representation in empirical research⁹¹ and is relied upon by researchers, journalists and citizens⁹² to qualify a system as democratic⁹³, making it of enduring relevance to discussions of democracy⁹⁴.

The term is typically understood to have two different meanings, either a requirement to take specific action or a permission to act as a representative in the best interest of those that granted the mandate⁹⁵. This paper uses the first meaning because it can be assessed more objectively than representation carried out according to broader and more subjective principles. Specifically, this interpretation has pledges serving as a way to establish a contract with voters which provides a party with an electoral mandate⁹⁶. Fulfilling these pledges thereby carries out the mandate⁹⁷. This pledge-to-policy link is described as key in the mandate theory of democracy⁹⁸.

Mandate & accountability

Mandate serves as one of the two major roles of elections: forward-looking, where voters consider possible governments, incumbents and opposition and the policy alternatives they represent⁹⁹ as targets of voting choice¹⁰⁰. The second major role is accountability, which is backward-looking, where citizens use information about parties' past performances for their voting choice¹⁰¹. These two roles can be seen as counterparts,

⁸⁶ Spoon, 2012, p.559

⁸⁷ Wüst & Schmitt, as cited in Spoon, 2012, p.570

⁸⁸ Thomassen, as cited in Louwerse, 2012, p.1249

⁸⁹ Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.70

⁹⁰ Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.69

⁹¹ Esaiasson & Holmberg; Pierce, as cited in Naurin, 2014, p.1048

⁹² Przeworski et al., 1999, p.30

⁹³ Klingemann et al.; Royed; Pierce; Thomson, as cited Moury, 2011, p.37

⁹⁴ Dahl; Klingemann et al.; Budge & Newton et al., as cited in Thomson, 2001, p.172

⁹⁵ Grossback, Peterson & Stimson, 2007, p.712

⁹⁶ Ray, as cited in Dolezal et al., 2018, p.243

⁹⁷ Grossback, Peterson & Stimson, 2007, p.718; Klingemann et al.; Royed; Pierce; Thomson, as cited in Moury, 2011, p.37

⁹⁸ Downs; Klingemann et al.; McDonald & Budge; Bingham Powell, as cited in Thomson et al, 2017, p.528

⁹⁹ Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.12

¹⁰⁰ Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.70

¹⁰¹ Przeworski, Stokes & Manin, 1999, p.44-45

although it is up for debate whether elections must offer minimum levels of both accountability and mandate or whether these are distinct ways of linking citizens and policy, meaning that each can still play a role without the other¹⁰². Regardless, the factors are mutually reinforcing: the threat of accountability helps to hold policy-makers to their mandate promises¹⁰³.

Accountability, being the evaluation of the incumbent government, serves as the simplest and most fundamental role of elections¹⁰⁴. The ability to hold representatives accountable by voting them out of office is also seen as the fundamental guarantee of the citizen-policy connection¹⁰⁵. It occurs, according to Przeworski, Stokes and Manin, when voters can identify whether governments are acting in their interest and can thus vote appropriately¹⁰⁶. In a representative democracy, this goes further than just the fulfilment of pledges. A party will also be judged on policy outcomes and any other actions that shape public perception.

Although citizens have no institutional tools to force parties to adhere to promises and can only sanction retroactively¹⁰⁷, the threat of this power also serves to control parties and shape policies in the present. It leads them to take such sanctions into account as a potential consequence of failing to fulfil pledges or otherwise acting in a way that negatively affects public perception¹⁰⁸. This means that manifestos and mandates are always relevant to two elections: the election which gains the party representation based on its manifesto and the subsequent election where voters assess if the party delivered on its pledges¹⁰⁹.

Requirements

The mandate model has two main requirements to create the voter-to-policy link¹¹⁰. Firstly, voters must be able to identify potential future governing parties and have some understanding of what they will do if elected. This is necessary for voters to be willing to use their vote to determine policies after election. Secondly, as a prerequisite for corresponding to voters' anticipations, a government must be capable of carrying out its policies¹¹¹. This is because voters will have little reason to continue to use their vote for the purposes of shaping future policy making if they have reason to believe that policymaking coalitions are not dependent on their support. Potential causes for this could be predetermined coalitions or overly complex political situations. Election-winning parties may lack the ability to carry out their policies if they do not dominate policy-making; forcing them to negotiate with losing parties which diminishes the impact of voting choice¹¹². However, even if an electoral majority is present, the capability can be limited by factors such as low cohesion within parties or coalitions, or by systems of governance which give the legislature strong powers¹¹³. Both conditions - identifiability and capability - are a function of constitutional design and political structure and are more likely to be produced in majoritarian systems¹¹⁴.

Mandate in practice: empirical evidence

Studies that compare pledges and subsequent policy actions, such as *Electoral promises and minority governments: An empirical study* by Artés and Bustos, conclude that elections serve to give parties a mandate to enact the policies

¹⁰² Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.86

¹⁰³ Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.859

¹⁰⁴ Fearon, 1999, p.45; Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.10

¹⁰⁵ Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.47

¹⁰⁶ Przeworski et al., 1999, p.40

¹⁰⁷ Przeworski et al., 1999, p.39

¹⁰⁸ Przeworski et al., 1999, p.40; Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.11

¹⁰⁹ Quinn, 2014, p.16

¹¹⁰ Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.76

¹¹¹ Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.71

¹¹² Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.12

¹¹³ Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.82

¹¹⁴ Powell, as cited in Shamir & Shamir, 2010, p.4

they proposed during the electoral campaign¹¹⁵. Using the Royed¹¹⁶ and Thomson¹¹⁷ methods (see pg. 27) to assess the fulfilment of individual pledges, empirical evidence shows that parties fulfil the majority of their election pledges, on average¹¹⁸. This is backed up by a number of other studies which also show that parties in developed democracies fulfil the majority of their pledges, despite institutional and economic differences between these countries¹¹⁹.

Mandate and electoral systems

Electoral systems have a large impact on an election's ability to create mandates. Specifically, this depends on the effect that the system has on how easily parties can form majorities and governments and thereby obtain executive power. In turn, this can also have a large effect on identifiability and capability. Majoritarian systems are essentially designed to create single-party governing majorities while proportional systems typically will require multi-party coalitions. EP elections take place using a proportional system but cannot directly create a governing majority with executive power. Due to these differences, mandate theory requires a different approach for each of these systems.

Majoritarian systems

In its simplest form, the mandate model states that the winner of an election is given the mandate to enact its pledges¹²⁰. In effect, this means that the winner takes all and enacts its pledges, whereas losers' pledges are ignored¹²¹. This is most clearly exemplified in majoritarian or two-party systems where elections typically produce a clear winner with a parliamentary majority. This gives the winning party a democratic mandate - both a right and an obligation to implement its proposed policies, which creates a link between the voters and the government's policy output¹²². Accountability is ensured by enabling voters to compare the party's performance directly with its manifesto and to vote accordingly at the subsequent election¹²³.

However, the mandate can sometimes be compromised when it rests on a majority in the legislature rather than a majority in the electorate¹²⁴. This situation can be created by electoral systems designed to create a government majority, which can turn a voter minority into government majority. This weakens election mandates because it makes them less effective as mechanisms for control by citizen majority, as they are instead formed by a distinctive minority¹²⁵.

Proportional systems - Government perspective

These mechanisms function more indirectly in proportional systems where voters use elections to choose actors that represent their views in post-election bargaining that results in policy¹²⁶ instead of immediately creating clear election winners and losers. Single-party majorities are rare or non-occurring in these systems which necessitates coalitions of multiple parties with multiple manifestos and multiple sets of pledges, which can be contradictory. As such, governments often have very low pre-election identifiability¹²⁷, meaning that majoritarian systems are generally more successful than proportional systems at creating conditions for mandates and accountability¹²⁸.

¹¹⁵ Artés & Bustos, 2008, p.308

¹¹⁶ 1996

¹¹⁷ 2001

¹¹⁸ Kostadinova, 2013, p.192

¹¹⁹ Artés & Bustos; Costello & Thomson; Moury; Naurin; Royed; Thomson, as cited in Kostadinova, 2013, p.190

¹²⁰ Quinn, 2014, p.32

¹²¹ Klingemann et al., as cited in Thomson, 2001, p.173

¹²² Louwerse, 2012, p.1250

¹²³ Quinn, 2014, p.6

¹²⁴ Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.77 & 80

¹²⁵ Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.81

¹²⁶ Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.233

¹²⁷ Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.73

¹²⁸ Bingham Powell Jr., 2000, p.86

Proportional systems - Representation perspective

Most studies on mandate compare manifestos and policies of governing parties¹²⁹ but ignore the mandate of opposition parties. This lack of attention is seen as justified by the fact that these parties lost the election and were not given a mandate to govern¹³⁰. Especially in proportional systems, this perspective can see many parties, voters, and votes excluded from the mandate process.

Taking the perspective of political representation will instead regard the opposition parties' mandates as being equally important as the government parties' mandates. The argument in favour of this perspective is that losing parties may lack a mandate to govern but they were still given a mandate to represent their voters in parliament¹³¹. These parties will not have the ability (i.e. parliamentary majority) to implement their election program - falling short of the strict capability requirement - but voters should still be able to expect that their parties, using the tools available to them, pursue policies that are in coherence with their pre-election proposals¹³². This perspective goes beyond simple policy output and also takes other actions of parties in parliament into account (such as speeches and votes)¹³³.

Proportional systems - European Parliament

The EP is one step further removed from the majoritarian system as there is no (governing) majority coalition and it works through shifting majorities instead of the traditional government-opposition divide. This falls short of the strict identifiability requirement and makes it untenable to consider its mandate function without including the mandate of non-governing parties. Unlike other proportional systems, it is impossible for any one party to win a parliamentary majority which makes the idea of a manifesto-derived mandate problematic. Any party will be at the mercy of other parties as it tries to implement its manifesto¹³⁴, meaning that it cannot fulfil the mandate model's requirement of capability. For such a system, it is more relevant to focus on the programme-to-policy link as described by Klingemann et al., in which manifestos translate into policies regardless of whether the party enters into government¹³⁵. This view of mandate binds all, including non-governing, elected representatives to the election programme of their party¹³⁶ and presents a solution to the problem of identifiability.

While the key principles of mandate theory (the pledge-to-output link) are applicable to EP-elections, the requirements of identifiability and capability cannot be fulfilled when using the traditional government-mandate perspective. As the EP has no government, no opposition and there are no clear winners and losers of the election, identifiability must be viewed with a representation perspective where it is a result of election campaigns, pledges and manifestos. Capability is still present in a form that is softer and broader than just strict policy output, which sees parties making use of the tools that are available to them to take policy-pursuing actions (e.g. agenda-setting).

2.2 Powers of the European Parliament

Since the EP's beginnings in 1958, inter-governmental treaties and other agreements have caused it to slowly transition from being a consultative assembly into being a key player in EU decision-making. Its current form and role in the institutional balance is a product of long-term and gradual evolution rather than intentional design¹³⁷, which may go some way in explaining the complexity of its powers. As shown in this section, the EP

¹²⁹ Klingemann et al.; Mansergh & Thomson; Royed, as cited in Louwerse, 2012, p.1249

¹³⁰ Louwerse, 2012, p.1251

¹³¹ Louwerse, 2012, p.1251

¹³² Louwerse, 2012, p.1250

¹³³ Louwerse, 2012, p.1251

¹³⁴ Quinn, 2014, p.12

¹³⁵ Klingemann et al., as cited in Thomson, 2001, p.174

¹³⁶ Budge & Newton et al., as cited in Thomson, 2001, p.171

¹³⁷ European Parliament, n.d.a.

has a number of different powers and functions in areas of legislation, budgets, constitutional matters, as well as supervision, appointments and foreign policy. These subsections serve as the basis of the coding scheme at the end of this chapter.

Legislation & legislative procedures

Choice of legislative procedure

The EP is involved in the making of legislation primarily through use of three legislative procedures: the Ordinary Legislative Procedure (OLP) and two Special Legislative Procedures, Consent and Consultation. The choice of legislative procedure is made by the Commission in its legislative proposals and is dependent on the treaty article relevant for the proposal's policy area(s). As laid out in an agreement between the three institutions, the choice is a "legal determination that must be made on objective grounds which are amenable to judicial review"¹³⁸, and that the Commission must "in a clear and complete way, justify the legal basis of the proposal, especially where it would seem that several options exist"¹³⁹.

This can still leave room for interpretation, which is always of great interest to the institutions due to its effect on the balance of power between them¹⁴⁰, and they will push for advantageous treaty articles when there is opportunity to do so¹⁴¹. In fact, legislative procedures are the strongest predictor whether specific EP pledges are likely to lead to proposals from the Commission. Specifically, election pledges are significantly more likely to be included in Commission proposals if these fall under the OLP¹⁴².

Legislative initiative

The Commission has had an almost exclusive monopoly to initiate legislation ever since the European Coal and Steel Community was established¹⁴³. This places strong limits on the EP's powers because decisions are not possible unless the Commission has produced a proposal. This also inevitably influences policy outcomes due to the fact that these proposals must be used as the starting point¹⁴⁴.

However, the EP and other institutions still have a formal role in the initiation of legislation by having the possibility to request proposals for legislative action¹⁴⁵. Such a request can be submitted when another institution considers that a "Union act is required for the purpose of implementing the treaties"¹⁴⁶. The Commission has no obligation to submit a proposal¹⁴⁷ but it is obliged to formally justify any non-compliance with the EP's requests. This requirement brings the EP close to the right to initiate legislation, but not close enough to tip the institutional power balance in favour of the EP and the Council at the expense of the Commission¹⁴⁸.

Ordinary Legislative Procedure

The OLP (previously known as co-decision) is the EU's standard legislative procedure in which it functions as a bi-cameral legislature¹⁴⁹. This procedure encompasses 85 issue areas¹⁵⁰ which makes it apply to the vast majority of European legislation¹⁵¹ (90% of legislation passed up to 2014¹⁵²). The procedure begins with a proposal text

¹³⁸ European Union, 2016.

¹³⁹ European Commission, n.d.b.

¹⁴⁰ Votewatch Europe, 2012, p.2

¹⁴¹ Corbett, Jacobs & Shackleton, 2011, p.269

¹⁴² Kostadinova & Giurcanu, 2019, p.9-10

¹⁴³ House of Lords, 2008, p.57; Kohler 2014, p.603

¹⁴⁴ Mussa, 2019

¹⁴⁵ Lindberg et al., 2008, p.1113

¹⁴⁶ Corbett et al., 2011, p.265

¹⁴⁷ Hardacre, 2011, p.87

¹⁴⁸ Kohler 2014, p.603

¹⁴⁹ Corbett et al., 2011, p.397

¹⁵⁰ Maurer, as cited in Kohler 2014, p.603-604

¹⁵¹ House of Lords - European Union Committee, 2008, p.66

¹⁵² Kohler 2014, p.609

from the Commission which the EP and the Council, on equal footing, must find an agreement on in three readings or fewer. Both institutions can veto and amend the text during any reading, with one exception: the Council may not propose any amendments in the second reading¹⁵³.

Formally, this procedure places the EP and the Council as equal legislators¹⁵⁴, but in practice the Council's bargaining advantages give it the stronger position¹⁵⁵, quantified by Costello and Thomson as being a 80%-20% power division in favour of the Council¹⁵⁶.

Trilogues

The OLP has made inter-institutional interactions increasingly important for the EP and the other institutions. Procedures known as trilogues have become the main mechanism for such interactions between the Commission, the EP and the Council¹⁵⁷. They are considered to be semi-formal procedures: they are not included in the treaties but rather described in the EP's Rules of Procedure with many of the details set down in practice¹⁵⁸. The purpose of trilogues is to enable early agreement that lightens workloads¹⁵⁹ and avoids the deadlines and stricter voting rules of subsequent readings¹⁶⁰. In particular, they are seen as standard operating procedure for legislative files that are regarded as technical, non-controversial and urgent¹⁶¹.

Studies have shown just how common these procedures have become: Kohler found that almost 80% of files in 2014 were negotiated in trilogues¹⁶². Although such informal negotiations offer a clear advantage in speeding up legislative procedures¹⁶³, they are also said to have a negative effect on the legitimacy of EU lawmaking¹⁶⁴ because they move political debate behind closed doors¹⁶⁵. Rather than a separation of powers, this creates the impression of a fusion of powers which can damage the transparency and democratic legitimacy of the EP¹⁶⁶ by diminishing its public arena function¹⁶⁷.

Yellow & orange cards

The OLP also contains a procedure known as yellow and orange cards that allow national parliaments to conduct subsidiarity checks of legislative proposals and object to legislation that they consider to be in breach of the subsidiarity principle¹⁶⁸. If a sufficient number of parliaments object to a proposal, the yellow card is triggered and the Commission must review its proposal and change, withdraw or maintain it¹⁶⁹. If a majority of parliaments object, the orange card is triggered¹⁷⁰, where the EP and the Council come into play if the Commission chooses to maintain its proposal. Both institutions will vote on whether the proposed legislation violates subsidiarity and an affirmative majority from either will terminate the proposal¹⁷¹.

The issue with this procedure is that subsidiarity is difficult to define and is more of a political rather than legal principle. Some, such as Miller, have called this procedure largely superfluous because the Council, representing

¹⁵³ European Parliament, n.d.b.

¹⁵⁴ Schimmelfennig, 2010, p.213; Kohler, 2014, p.609

¹⁵⁵ Costello & Thomson, 2013, p.1025; Burns, Rasmussen & Reh, 2013, p.945

¹⁵⁶ Costello & Thomson, 2013, p.1036

¹⁵⁷ Brandsma, 2015, p.301

¹⁵⁸ Corbett et al., 2011, p.242

¹⁵⁹ Brandsma, 2015, p.301

¹⁶⁰ Brandsma, 2015, p.303

¹⁶¹ De Ruiter & Neuhold, as cited in Brandsma, 2015, p.303

¹⁶² Kohler, 2014, p.612

¹⁶³ Corbett et al., 2011, p.244

¹⁶⁴ Farrell & Heritier, as cited in Brandsma, 2015, p.301

¹⁶⁵ De Ruiter & Neuhold, as cited in Brandsma, 2015, p.300-301

¹⁶⁶ European Parliament, as cited in Kohler, 2014, p.610-612

¹⁶⁷ Kohler 2014, p.612

¹⁶⁸ House of Lords - European Union Committee, 2008, p.236

¹⁶⁹ European Commission, n.d.a.

¹⁷⁰ Kohler 2014, p.610-611

¹⁷¹ Miller, 2011, p.327

national interests, is already likely to vote down proposals that violate the subsidiarity principle without needing formal objections from national parliaments¹⁷². Due to these reasons, it has very rarely been used: between 2009 and 2019 the yellow card procedure was triggered three times and the orange card procedure has never been used¹⁷³.

Special Legislative Procedure: Consent

The Consent procedure allows the EP to reject or approve a Commission proposal¹⁷⁴, which the Council is obliged to follow¹⁷⁵. The EP's power to block decisions causes its position to be seen as important throughout the process¹⁷⁶, but the lack of the power of amendment means that the EP is less influential than under the OLP¹⁷⁷. This procedure is, among other areas, used for the ratification of most international agreements negotiated by the EU, such as trade agreements¹⁷⁸, association agreements¹⁷⁹, accession or withdrawal of Member States¹⁸⁰, agreements that relate to OLP-governed areas¹⁸¹ and other agreements that have budgetary or institutional implications¹⁸². It is also applicable when a Member State is considered to be in serious breach of the EU's founding values¹⁸³. Essentially, the areas where the EP has competences are also the areas which require its consent for related international agreements¹⁸⁴. For example, this means that EP consent is not required for international agreements that relate exclusively to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)¹⁸⁵.

Special Legislative Procedure: Consultation

Consultation is a procedure in which the Commission seeks the opinion of the EP on a proposal and where the Council is given the final decision¹⁸⁶. It is used in areas such as internal market exemptions, competition law¹⁸⁷ and the exchange rate of the euro¹⁸⁸ and is not a commonly used procedure, with 7% and 11% of legislation falling under consultation in 2010 and 2011, respectively¹⁸⁹. Although the EP has the right to approve, reject or amend proposals, this is merely done in an advisory function¹⁹⁰ where the Council is not obliged to follow the EP's position¹⁹¹. This certainly shows in the statistics: in the period of 1999 to 2007, the EP's demands were ignored by the Council in more than 80% of proposals¹⁹².

The only hurdle for the Council in this procedure is that it may not take a decision until it has received the EP's opinion¹⁹³. This creates a crucial, albeit limited, power for the EP: the ability to delay the decision-making process¹⁹⁴ which it can use to get concessions from the Council¹⁹⁵. In practice, the EP rarely uses this ability¹⁹⁶.

¹⁷² Miller, 2011, p.327

¹⁷³ European Commission, n.d.a.

¹⁷⁴ Corbett et al., 2011, p.251; Kohler 2014, p.604

¹⁷⁵ General Secretariat of the Council, 2018

¹⁷⁶ Corbett et al., 2011, p.252

¹⁷⁷ Occhipinti, 2014, p.91-92

¹⁷⁸ EU Monitor, n.d.a.

¹⁷⁹ House of Lords - European Union Committee, 2008, p.66

¹⁸⁰ Kohler 2014, p.604-605

¹⁸¹ Ripoll Servent, 2014, p.571; Meissner, 2016, p.287

¹⁸² House of Lords - European Union Committee, 2008, p.66

¹⁸³ Kohler 2014, p.604-605

¹⁸⁴ Occhipinti, 2014, p.94

¹⁸⁵ Riddervold & Rosén, 2015, p.401

¹⁸⁶ Kardasheva, 2009, p.386-387

¹⁸⁷ General Secretariat of the Council, 2018

¹⁸⁸ EU Monitor, n.d.a.

¹⁸⁹ Votewatch Europe, as cited in Kohler 2014, p.604-605

¹⁹⁰ Thomson & Hosli, 2006, p.392

¹⁹¹ General Secretariat of the Council, 2018

¹⁹² Kardasheva, 2009, p.386

¹⁹³ General Secretariat of the Council, 2018

¹⁹⁴ Kardasheva, 2009, p.388; Rasmussen & Toshkov, 2011, p.93

¹⁹⁵ Kardasheva, 2009, p.388

¹⁹⁶ Kardasheva, as cited in Rasmussen & Toshkov, 2011, p.93

Rasmussen and Toshkov hypothesise that this is because the mere threat of delay is enough to give the EP a certain level of influence¹⁹⁷.

Delegated & Implementing acts

Most of the EU's legal acts are executive acts. In recent years, this has been around 3000 executive acts per year, to be compared with around 100 acts per year adopted through the OLP¹⁹⁸. These administrative laws are made by regulators - the Commission and various European agencies - rather than by legislators and are, since 2009's Lisbon treaty, drafted in two ways: as delegated acts or as implementing acts¹⁹⁹.

Implementing acts aim to create uniform conditions for the implementation of EU legislation by Member States²⁰⁰, and are created by committees of Member State and Commission representatives²⁰¹. The EP and the Council sit on these committees to scrutinise them but have no formal control²⁰². Delegated acts instead supplement or amend non-essential²⁰³ or technical elements of a legislative act, meaning that they change the actual content of legislation²⁰⁴. The Commission is empowered by the EP and Council to adopt such acts²⁰⁵. Either the EP or Council can block such acts from coming into force²⁰⁶ but lack the right of amendment.

Budgets

Annual budget

The annual budgetary procedure is similar to the OLP in terms of procedure and the role of the EP. The Commission proposes a draft budget after which the Council and EP, on equal footing, have three readings to make amendments and reach an agreement. If this process fails, a modified version of the previous year's budget enters into force²⁰⁷.

Both institutions have the potential to substantially modify the political direction of parts of the budget²⁰⁸, but the EP is the most important actor in the procedure because it has the final say²⁰⁹ and has shown itself to be willing to use this powerful position to pursue its policy goals²¹⁰. For example, by pressuring the Commission by freezing and releasing budget items pending certain demands²¹¹. Crombez and Hoyland downplay the power of this method due to the voting coalitions it requires: the qualified majority needed in the Council typically also includes governing parties represented by a majority of MEPs, making support in the Council the decisive constraint in this procedure²¹².

Multiannual Financial Framework

The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is the EU's long-term budget which sets ceilings for annual budgets and covers a period of five to seven years. Its purpose is to match spending with political priorities while maintaining a level of predictability²¹³. The MFF has treaty status and obliges institutions to incorporate it into

¹⁹⁷ Rasmussen & Toshkov, 2011, p.93

¹⁹⁸ Brandsma & Blom-Hansen, as cited in Siderius & Brandsma, 2016, p.1265

¹⁹⁹ Peers & Costa, 2012, p.427

²⁰⁰ Siderius & Brandsma, 2016, p.1266

²⁰¹ Miller, 2011, p.324

²⁰² Corbett et al., 2011, p.330-331

²⁰³ Siderius & Brandsma, 2016, p.1266

²⁰⁴ Miller, 2011, p.329

²⁰⁵ Kohler, 2014, p.611-612

²⁰⁶ Corbett et al., 2011, p.330

²⁰⁷ Crombez & Høyland, 2015, p.68-69

²⁰⁸ Corbett et al., 2011, p.279

²⁰⁹ Kohler 2014, p.603-604

²¹⁰ Corbett et al., 2011, p.282

²¹¹ Corbett et al., 2011, p.285

²¹² Crombez & Høyland, 2015, p.68

²¹³ General Secretariat of the Council, 2019

EU law²¹⁴. It is primarily negotiated between the Commission and Council²¹⁵, and is adopted unanimously by the Council after obtaining consent from the EP²¹⁶.

Constitutional matters

Treaties

The EP plays a formal role in all of the four procedures for treaty revision. However, these roles are all minor and mean that the EP's ability to create long-term systemic change is weak²¹⁷ because the European Council always has the final say²¹⁸.

1. The **ordinary revision procedure** is the traditional method of treaty revision in order to expand or reduce the competences of the EU²¹⁹. Any Member State, the Commission or the EP can submit a proposal to amend the treaties to the Council, which can reject or forward this proposal to the European Council. The European Council can then decide to call a Convention where negotiations are held with representatives from national parliaments, the European Council, the European Parliament and the Commission. The outcome of the Convention is then sent to an Intergovernmental Conference, after which all Member States must ratify the amendments²²⁰. There is also a shortened version of this procedure in which the European Council can decide that a convention is not necessary, if it receives consent from the EP²²¹. This allows the process to jump straight to the Intergovernmental Conference if amendments are not considered to be a significant change²²².
2. The **simplified revision procedure** can be used for treaty changes that do not extend the powers of the EU²²³ and has the advantage of avoiding the need to convene a European Convention and an Intergovernmental Conference²²⁴.
3. The **passerelle** clause allows the European Council to change the treaties' voting- or legislative procedures for specific policy areas without having to directly amend the texts. The clause allows for changing from unanimity to Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) in the Council and from a Special Legislative Procedure to the OLP. Depending on the policy area, either consent must be obtained from the EP and national parliaments are given veto power for a limited time period²²⁵, or the EP is merely consulted²²⁶.
4. The **procedure of enhanced co-operation** allows a smaller number of Member States to deepen cooperation in most of the areas covered by the treaties if consent is obtained from the EP²²⁷.

Inter-institutional agreements

Inter-institutional agreements (IIA's) are semi-constitutional laws that are concluded between the EP, Council and Commission in order to shape legal, procedural and financial aspects of their working relationship²²⁸. They are used as an alternative to treaty amendments²²⁹ which are slower and more difficult to implement. Due to the EP's minimal role in treaty changes, IIA's are considered to be its most effective method of obtaining further powers²³⁰. In the past, IIA's have expanded the EP's rights in areas such as trade²³¹, participation in international

²¹⁴ Corbett et al., 2011, p.274

²¹⁵ General Secretariat of the Council, 2019

²¹⁶ Crombez & Høyland, 2015, p.67-68

²¹⁷ Kohler 2014, p.601

²¹⁸ Kohler 2014, p.607-608

²¹⁹ EUR-Lex, 2015

²²⁰ EU Monitor, n.d.c

²²¹ EUR-Lex, 2015

²²² EU Monitor, n.d.c

²²³ Kohler 2014, p.607-608

²²⁴ EUR-Lex, 2015

²²⁵ Ó Broin, 2010

²²⁶ EUR-Lex, 2015

²²⁷ Kohler 2014, p.607-608

²²⁸ EU Monitor, n.d.b.

²²⁹ EUABC.com, n.d.

²³⁰ Maurer et al., as cited in Herranz-Surrallés, 2014, p.962

²³¹ Maurer, as cited in Rosén, 2016, p.413

agreements²³² and abilities to supervise the Commission and the Council in various stages of the policy-making process²³³. Despite the existence of concrete examples, the potential of IIA's to affect the EP's powers in the future is particularly difficult to determine as there is a distinct lack of research in the area²³⁴.

Supervision, appointment and other areas

The EP has a significant role in the scrutiny and control of other institutions. As the EP hardly has any formal sanctioning powers²³⁵, this is primarily enacted through informal means such as debates, questions and reports²³⁶, supplemented by media coverage, events, high-level networking and political connections²³⁷. The supervisory powers are the following:

- The Commission and other institutions have an obligation to answer questions and report to the EP²³⁸.
- It can set up committees of inquiry to put issues on the political agenda²³⁹.
- It can receive and investigate written petitions from citizens that comment upon the application of EU law. If necessary, it can request inquiries from the Commission or the involved Member States²⁴⁰.
- It can bring non-application or incorrect application of EU law in Member States to the attention of the Commission so it can start infringement proceedings²⁴¹.
- It can call upon the European Court of Justice to ensure that other EU institutions act legally and according to treaties²⁴².

Agenda-setting

In terms of agenda-setting, the EP lacks formal instruments such as a direct right of legislative initiative. It also lacks the power to keep issues off the agenda²⁴³. However, it has a few options to influence policy or to raise issues:

- Own-initiative reports, resolutions and Written Declarations; to call for action from other institutions, show positions or demonstrate activities.
- Parliamentary hearings, to seek independent expertise, give a platform or to demonstrate an MEP's position²⁴⁴.

Arena function

The EP also serves as a public arena of debate and conflict²⁴⁵ and a channel for communication, often in response to concerns of EU citizens²⁴⁶. However, the more recent developments of the EP's powers (especially since the Treaty of Lisbon) has seen it shifting away from public debate and more towards less visible, often technical legislative work²⁴⁷ such as trilogues²⁴⁸. Decision-making of this type gives the appearance that the large party groups vote as a singular bloc with decreased political debate and conflict²⁴⁹.

²³² Ripoll Servent, 2014, p.580-581; Meissner, 2016, p.269-270

²³³ Kohler 2014, p.611-612

²³⁴ Hummer, as cited in Wiesner, 2018, p.378

²³⁵ Kluger Dionigi & Koop, 2019, p.787

²³⁶ Corbett et al., 2011, p.311

²³⁷ Hardacre, 2011, p.88

²³⁸ Hardacre, 2011, p.88; Corbett, Jacobs & Shackleton, 2011, p.314

²³⁹ Corbett et al., 2011, p.331

²⁴⁰ Corbett et al., 2011, p.346

²⁴¹ Corbett et al., 2011, p.339

²⁴² Corbett et al., 2011, p.335

²⁴³ Lindberg et al., 2008, p.1113

²⁴⁴ Corbett et al., 2011, p.341-342

²⁴⁵ Kohler 2014, p.600

²⁴⁶ Corbett et al., 2011, p.340

²⁴⁷ Kohler 2014, p.605

²⁴⁸ Kohler 2014, p.612

²⁴⁹ Kohler 2014, p.600

Additionally, the arena function suffers from the fact that the Commission is not recruited from a majority coalition within the EP²⁵⁰. Although this gives the EP great autonomy from the executive²⁵¹, it also means that there is no classical differentiation between the opposition and the parliamentary majority that supports the executive²⁵².

Budgetary control & discharge

The EP also monitors the Commission's implementation of the annual budget and grants discharge to the financial year²⁵³. The political and legal ramifications of refusing to discharge a budget are unclear as they are not stipulated in the treaties, but there is no doubt that it constitutes a major political reprimand of the Commission²⁵⁴. The EP has taken this step on two occasions, in 1984, when the consequences were limited as the Commission was already nearing the end of its term, and in 1998, when it was a contributing factor to the Commission's resignation²⁵⁵.

Control of the Commission

As laid out in the treaties, the Commission is responsible to the EP²⁵⁶, meaning that the EP holds the power to censure the Commission through a vote of no confidence²⁵⁷. This is the EP's only formal and direct power of censure and it is key in the institutional power balance as its mere existence is enough to make the Commission take the EP's view very seriously²⁵⁸.

Appointment

The EP has various powers of appointment. For instance, it is consulted for the appointment of various top positions in the ECB, Court of Auditors²⁵⁹; and can directly appoint the Ombudsman²⁶⁰, the director of EFSA as well as various board members for EU agencies and representatives to scientific committees²⁶¹.

More prominent and more politically salient, however, is the EP's role in appointing the Commission. It must consent to the appointment of the Commission, as a whole²⁶², as proposed by the European Council. Despite the EP's lack of formal power to consent to individual Commissioners, it has involved itself in appointment procedures of Commissioners by inviting them to hearings in relevant committees²⁶³. This has, in some cases, been successful in influencing allocations of portfolios or rejecting individual appointments²⁶⁴.

Election of Commission President

The EP must also approve the European Council's candidate for the Presidency of the European Commission. This has been a prominent topic of debate since the Treaty of Lisbon in which the procedure was made more ambiguous and shifted in favour of the EP²⁶⁵. It states that the European Council has to nominate the Commission President while "taking into account the elections to the European Parliament" and that the EP

²⁵⁰ Hix, as cited in Lindberg et al., 2008, p.1109

²⁵¹ Corbett et al., 2011, p.377

²⁵² Pollack, as cited in Kohler 2014, p.603-605

²⁵³ Hardacre, 2011, p.87; Corbett et al., 2011, p.286

²⁵⁴ Corbett et al., 2011, p.287

²⁵⁵ D'Alfonso, 2016, p.5

²⁵⁶ House of Lords - European Union Committee, 2008, p.61

²⁵⁷ Hix et al., as cited in Lindberg et al., 2008, p.1109

²⁵⁸ Corbett et al., 2011, p.311

²⁵⁹ Kohler 2014, p.606

²⁶⁰ Corbett et al., 2011, p.349

²⁶¹ Corbett et al., 2011, p.302-303

²⁶² Schimmelfennig, 2010, p.213

²⁶³ Maurer, as cited in Kohler 2014, p.605; Christiansen, 2016, p.1002

²⁶⁴ Christiansen, 2016, p.1002

²⁶⁵ Christiansen, 2016, p.992

would “elect” rather than “approve” the candidate²⁶⁶; which was considered a powerful symbolic change²⁶⁷. This new wording was intended to give EP elections more weight²⁶⁸ and address the EU’s legitimacy issues by involving voters in the choice of leadership of the EU’s executive for the first time²⁶⁹, creating a direct link between the EP and the Commission’s work programme and better mobilising voters²⁷⁰.

The EP’s major groups chose to interpret this change as meaning that the party affiliation of the Commission President should mirror that of the largest group in the EP²⁷¹ and put forward Commission President candidates in 2014²⁷², which came to be known as Spitzenkandidaten. The EP secretariat also campaigned using this interpretation with the claim that “for the first time, the composition of the new European Parliament will determine who will lead the next European Commission”²⁷³.

Against expectations²⁷⁴, the final outcome was in the EP’s favour when the European Council eventually nominated Jean-Claude Juncker, the candidate of the largest EP group. However, the ambiguity of the legal basis remained and in 2019 the European Council nominated Ursula von der Leyen, a candidate who was not put forward by any of the EP groups. Von der Leyen was later elected by the EP, possibly already marking the end of the Spitzenkandidaten system.

Common Foreign and Security Policy

The EU’s CFSP (including the Common Security and Defence Policy, CSDP) is a non-legislative²⁷⁵ intergovernmental instrument which gives agenda-setting, decision-making and veto powers to the Member States. These powers are not delegated to the supranational institutions²⁷⁶. According to the treaties, EP consent is not required for agreements that relate exclusively to the CFSP. Instead it only has marginal powers: the right to be consulted and informed²⁷⁷. Despite this very limited formal role, the EP manages to be relatively influential in this policy domain by use of its budgetary powers²⁷⁸. As CFSP expenses are part of the Community budget, the EP is given (shared) budgetary authority, which gives it leverage²⁷⁹.

Coding EP powers

As shown in this chapter, the EP has a number of different powers and functions in areas of legislation, budgets, constitutional matters, as well as supervision, appointments and foreign policy. These are incorporated into the coding scheme above (Table 1). The powers of the EP are broad: practically any pledge can be pursued by use of resolutions and other methods of agenda-setting, which in some circumstances can affect decision-making even in absence of formal EP powers. This makes it difficult to draw a line between what is and what is not within the EP’s competences and means that pledge coding cannot be done without playing attention to informal power.

Creating relevant categories

Grouping EP powers into appropriate categories for coding is not straight-forward and can be done in many different ways, not least depending on the aims of the study. For this study they are primarily grouped by the

²⁶⁶ House of Lords - European Union Committee, 2008, p.60

²⁶⁷ Christiansen, 2016, p.993

²⁶⁸ Braun & Popa, 2018, p.1126

²⁶⁹ Christiansen, 2016, p.993; Shackleton (2014), as cited in Shackleton, 2017, p.197

²⁷⁰ Kohler 2014, p.605-606

²⁷¹ Schimmelfennig, 2010, p.213

²⁷² Christiansen, 2016, p.993

²⁷³ Christiansen, 2016, p.995

²⁷⁴ Shackleton, 2017, p.197

²⁷⁵ Herranz-Surrallés, 2014, p.966

²⁷⁶ Riddervold & Rosén, 2015, p.399

²⁷⁷ Riddervold & Rosén, 2015, p.401

²⁷⁸ Herranz-Surrallés, 2014, p.971

²⁷⁹ Riddervold & Rosén, 2015, p.401

EP's formal powers within treaty-defined policy areas. A number of non-legislative exceptions (e.g. annual budget and passerelles) are included as they allow the EP decisive powers. The resulting five coding categories were created during the coding process and are derived from the content of the pledges to maximise accuracy and efficiency. As a result, every area has at least one pledge assigned to it. Defining categories before the coding would have either led to too many areas being included in the coding scheme (causing inefficiency due to unnecessary research) or too few, causing pledges to be matched with the wrong areas due to the risk of missing out on relevant areas (leading to inaccuracy).

Coding scheme	
Amendment + veto	Ordinary legislative procedure: TFEU art. 14, 15(3), 16(2), 18, 19(2), 21(2), 24, 33, 42, 43(2), 46, 48, 50(1), 51, 52(2), 53(1), 56, 59(1), 62, 64(2), 75, 77(2), 78(2), 79(2), 79(4), 81(2), 82, 83(2), 84, 85(1), 87(2), 88(2), 91(1), 100(2), 114(1), 116, 118, 121(6), 129(3), 133, 136(1), 149, 153(2), 157(3), 164, 165(4), 166(4), 167(5), 168(4), 168(5), 169(3), 172, 175, 177, 178, 182, 188, 189(2), 192, 194, 195(2), 196(2), 197(2), 207(2), 209(1), 212(2), 214, 224, 257, 281, 291(3), 298(2), 322, 325(4), 336, 338(1).
	Annual budget
Veto	Special legislative procedure (Consent): TEU art. 7, 47(3), 49, 50 & TFEU art. 19(1), 25, 82(2), 83(1), 86, 207, 218, 223, 312, 352, 311(4), 329(1).
	General passerelles: Transfer of an area requiring unanimity in Council to QMV art. 48(7) TEU; transfer of a matter requiring special legislative procedure to OLP art. 48(7) TEU.
	Enhanced Cooperation
	Orange Card
Minimal or informal powers	Special legislative procedure (Consultation): TFEU art. 21(3), 22, 23, 64(3), 74, 77(3), 78(3), 81(3), 87(3), 89, 103(1), 109, 113, 115, 118, 125(2), 126(14), 127(6), 129(4), 140(2), 182(4), 187, 188(2), 192(2), 194(3), 203, 262, 308, 311, 322(2), 349(2)
	Specific passerelles: Common Foreign and Security Policy art. 31(3) TEU; judicial cooperation in civil matters art 81(3) TFEU; social policy art. 153(2) TFEU; environmental policy art. 192(2) TFEU; Multiannual Financial Framework art. 312(2) TFEU; Enhanced Cooperation art. 333(2) TFEU.
	Treaty revision
	Common Foreign and Security Policy (incl. Common Security and Defense Policy)
	Legislative initiative
	Member State competence or calls for national/subnational action
Unknown (Excluded areas)	Call for Commission action
	Delegated Acts & Implementing Acts
	Inter-Institutional Agreements
	Appointment
	Statute changes: e.g. TFEU art. 223(2)
	Other areas: e.g. Scrutiny & control; Budgetary control & discharge; Choice of legal basis; Arena function & agenda-setting
Indeterminable (Uncodable)	Ambiguous policy area

Table 1. Coding scheme: EP powers and relevant (policy) areas

Excluded (policy) areas

A number of areas are excluded despite giving the EP formal powers. Some of these areas are selected because they specifically contain too much complexity or rely too much on informal processes that do not include a well-defined role of the EP. This includes Inter-Institutional Agreements; choice of legal basis; Delegated acts and Implementing acts; statutes of the EP or other institutions; the EP's arena function, agenda-setting, scrutiny and (budgetary) control. Other formal powers, such as appointment, are excluded because they are insufficiently related to legislation.

Although there is, in effect, little difference between indeterminable and unknown EP powers, these pledges are kept separated rather than combined into a single category. This is because uncodable pledges are uncodable due to the pledges themselves (often a lack of specificity) while excluded pledges are excluded due to the study design, and may therefore have different effects on the results and conclusions of this study.

Legislative initiative

Legislative initiative is a different type of topic because it can rarely be seen as its own area. Although it is applicable to nearly all pledges - the EP has to rely on the Commission for most of its legislation - this is typically in addition to the relevant policy area, procedure and EP power. Choosing legislative initiative for this type of pledge would categorise the EP as having minimal powers almost across the board, whereas later stages of the same procedure might well give the EP amendment and veto powers through the OLP. As this would give an unrepresentative view of the EP's powers, the problem of legislative initiative is disregarded in this study and the pledge is coded according to the EP powers that apply at later stages of the procedure. As such, pledges are only coded as relevant to legislative initiative if they concern the concept itself.

3. Methods

This chapter looks at some of the challenges that must be overcome to successfully analyse political text. This includes reliably defining pledges and units of observation, dealing with ambiguity and the impact of coder bias, and a few examples of relevant coding projects. The chapter also goes into the reliability of unitisation and coding methods, and presents a key variable for this study: Guaranteed EP Impact.

Coding methods

The first stage of turning text into useful data is a systematic conversion into usable units. This is most commonly done in two steps; the first of which parses the text into relevant and useable units of observation²⁸⁰. This first step has three stages: design of a coding scheme; definition of text units and coding of text units²⁸¹. In the second step, units are coded by being assigned to a category from the coding scheme²⁸².

Units of observation

Due to the effect on validity and reliability, it is of great importance for the analysis of political text to unambiguously define the unit of text analysis²⁸³. This can be done exogenously to the coding process using predefined rules: for example, defining a unit as a word, word sequence, natural sentence, or entire page²⁸⁴. For manifesto analysis, using natural sentences may appear to be an appropriate choice for reasons of context, but while it creates perfect reliability in unitisation, it will be to the detriment of coding validity because natural sentences can contain multiple statements, forcing the coder into a suboptimal choice²⁸⁵. The other option is to determine units endogenously to the coding process, as part of the content analysis. Reliability suffers as this introduces (more) human judgment into the process, but validity is improved due to the use of context. The choice between exogenous or endogenous definitions is therefore largely a trade-off between validity and reliability.

The dominant approach²⁸⁶ is to favour validity by using endogenously-defined quasi-sentences; defined as the expression of a single policy idea²⁸⁷. This can be a complete sentence or a partial sentence that could also be

²⁸⁰ Mikhaylov, Laver & Benoit, 2012, p.78

²⁸¹ Laver & Garry, 2000, p.622

²⁸² Mikhaylov et al., 2012, p.78

²⁸³ Däubler, Benoit, Mikhaylov & Laver, 2012, p.949

²⁸⁴ Däubler et al., 2012, p.938

²⁸⁵ Däubler et al., 2012, p.949

²⁸⁶ Däubler et al., 2012, p.937-938

²⁸⁷ Volkens, as cited in Zulianello, 2014, p.1728

used as a complete sentence²⁸⁸, often identifiable by the use of punctuation²⁸⁹. It is commonly used despite its reliability drawbacks²⁹⁰ because it tackles two problems:

1. It allows the multiple statements which may be contained within a single natural sentence to be separated and individually coded²⁹¹;
2. It decreases the impact of stylistic decisions made by the manifesto writer²⁹². For instance, one manifesto may use many long sentences containing multiple statements whereas another may stick to shorter, simpler sentences²⁹³.

Defining 'pledge'

The concept 'pledge' requires a precise definition in order to enable the reliable extraction of pledges from political texts. For instance, it can be defined as a statement containing political intentions or promises²⁹⁴ indicating commitment to an action or an outcome. Such commitment language can be firm, such as "we will" or "we promise to", or softer such as "we support" or "we favour"²⁹⁵. However, even firm language may not always enable researchers to test the fulfilment of pledges²⁹⁶ or allow voters to hold parties accountable for their actions²⁹⁷. Rather, it is necessary to make a distinction between rhetoric (or statements about general ideological principles²⁹⁸) and testable pledges by creating a stricter and more usable definition: such as a "commitment to carry out an action or produce an outcome, where an objective estimation can be made as to whether or not the action was indeed taken or the outcome produced"²⁹⁹. This definition, created by Terry Royed, has become widely used in studies by Kostadinova; Håkansson and Naurin; Artés and Bustos, Thomson³⁰⁰ and many others³⁰¹. When this definition is applied to the context of pledges in manifestos, the objective criteria for fulfilment of a pledge must be provided by the manifesto itself rather than by external information or by the interpretation of the researcher³⁰², or it is likely to lead to coding mistakes³⁰³.

Impact of ambiguous pledges

Coding errors may also be caused by the fact that parties will sometimes intentionally make their positions vague³⁰⁴ or overly complex, making it difficult to identify the most appropriate category for a pledge³⁰⁵. Large parties in particular are more likely to use ambiguous language in their policy statements as they look to appeal to larger and therefore more heterogeneous groups of voters that have potentially conflicting policy preferences³⁰⁶. The narrower appeal of small parties means that they can be more explicit³⁰⁷. Similarly, governing parties are more likely to produce manifestos that are more detailed than those of opposition parties, as they need to develop positions on a wider array of issues³⁰⁸.

²⁸⁸ Laver & Garry, 2000, p.624

²⁸⁹ Bevan, John & Jennings, 2011, p.404

²⁹⁰ Laver & Garry, 2000, p.624; Däubler et al., 2012, p.937

²⁹¹ Däubler et al., 2012, p.943

²⁹² Däubler et al., 2012, p.937

²⁹³ Laver & Garry, 2000, p.624

²⁹⁴ Annema & van Wee, 2008, p.284

²⁹⁵ Thomson et al, 2017, p.532

²⁹⁶ Thomson et al, 2017, p.528

²⁹⁷ Naurin, 2014, p.1046

²⁹⁸ Costello & Thomson, 2008, p.242

²⁹⁹ Royed, 1996, p.79

³⁰⁰ Thomson, 2001, p.180; Artés & Bustos, 2008, p.310; Kostadinova, 2013, p.195; Håkansson & Naurin, 2016, p.397

³⁰¹ Mansergh; Mansergh & Thomson, as cited in Costello & Thomson, 2008, p.241; McCluskey, as cited in Moury, 2011, p.38; Moury, 2011, p.39; Naurin, 2014, p.1051

³⁰² Thomson, 2001, p.180

³⁰³ Annema & van Wee, 2008, p.288

³⁰⁴ Bräuninger & Giger; Lo et al.; Rovny, as cited in Bischof & Senniger, 2018, p.475

³⁰⁵ Ennser-Jedenastik & Meyer, 2018, p.626

³⁰⁶ Krosnick, as cited in Dolezal et al., 2018, p.245

³⁰⁷ Dolezal et al., 2018, p.24

³⁰⁸ Marks et al., as cited in Krouwel & van Elfrinkhof, 2014, p.1462

Internal compromises that attempt to strike a balance between different factions within a party are an additional cause of ambiguous language³⁰⁹. Parties that aim to implement their favoured policies while also aiming to be elected and re-elected³¹⁰ may believe that these goals require different and sometimes conflicting positions. Such considerations can result in parties choosing to describe desired states of the world rather than committing themselves to policies³¹¹. This can be statements about unspecified improvement, such as “fairer pensions, better education or reasonable taxes”, or may be statements that do not contain an intention to act. Such pledges require value judgments on the part of the reader³¹² and are open to interpretation³¹³, meaning that their fulfilment cannot be evaluated³¹⁴.

Impact of coder bias

Coder bias is also likely to influence results because expert coders by definition have prior knowledge about the context of a pledge or manifesto. This may make a coder more likely to interpret an ambiguous statement using knowledge about the party that produced it. Some coding projects deal with the difficult decisions of this type by making use of the interpretation of multiple coders³¹⁵. However, this is a rarity, as most texts are not coded by more than one person due to workload, which can create doubts about reliability³¹⁶.

The use of human judgment inevitably means that coding will be based on the actual content as well as the prior knowledge and opinions of the coder³¹⁷. Ennser-Jedenastik and Meyer found evidence of this in a study focused specifically on immigration policy statements, with results showing that coders will use contextual information (party labels, in the study) to interpret pledges. The effect was shown to be stronger when statements are ambiguous³¹⁸ or where parties have strong policy reputations³¹⁹.

However, the impact of contextual knowledge is not necessarily negative. The effect can be positive when the aim is to establish policy positions, in which case the use of contextual information could help to improve validity. It is worth noting that data validity will only be improved if prior knowledge is accurate: that is, objective knowledge about party policy rather than subjective party evaluations³²⁰. When the coding concerns pledges within a specific text rather than broader policy positions, the use of prior knowledge and information external to the manifesto will tend to reduce validity.

Manifesto analysis projects

This section looks at three manifesto coding methods that are particularly relevant to this study due to their methodology or prominent use. MARPOR is the largest manifesto analysis project of its kind, EMP specifically studies EP-manifestos, and the Royed and Thomson method of pledge coding is commonly used for studies of pledge fulfilment and is partially used as a basis for this study.

Manifesto Research on Political Representation (MARPOR)

The Manifesto Research on Political Representation (MARPOR) project began in 1979 (having previously been known as the Manifesto Research Group and later the Comparative Manifestos Project³²¹) with the aim of

³⁰⁹ Krouwel & van Elfrinkhof, 2014, p.1462

³¹⁰ Przeworski et al., 1999, p.31

³¹¹ Naurin; Royed; Thomson; Thomson et al., as cited in Dolezal et al., 2018, p.241

³¹² Dolezal et al., 2018, p.242-243

³¹³ Håkansson & Naurin; Thomson et al., as cited in Dolezal et al., 2018, p.243

³¹⁴ Dolezal et al., 2018, p.243

³¹⁵ Carter, Ladrech, Little & Tsagkroni, 2018, p.734

³¹⁶ Volkens, as cited in Carter et al., 2018, p.734

³¹⁷ Laver & Garry, as cited in Ennser-Jedenastik & Meyer, 2018, p.626

³¹⁸ Ennser-Jedenastik & Meyer, 2018, p.629-630

³¹⁹ Ennser-Jedenastik & Meyer, 2018, p.632

³²⁰ Ennser-Jedenastik & Meyer, 2018, p.631

³²¹ Merz, Regel & Lewandowski, 2016, p.1

determining the policy preferences of political parties by collecting and coding election manifestos³²². It is considered the dominant and most popular source of expert-coded parties' policy positions³²³ and its quantitative content analysis methodology has come to be the "best-known approach" for studying manifestos³²⁴. By 2014, it had coded 3500 manifestos from 880 political parties in 55 countries, all using the same method³²⁵. The resulting dataset has been used in hundreds of studies on political parties, party systems, coalition building, agenda-setting, party strategies and voting behaviour³²⁶ and represents the only time series of estimated party policy positions of its scope³²⁷. Its methodology has also served as the basis of other large projects such as the Euromanifesto Project, the Regional Manifestos Project and the Comparative Agendas Project³²⁸.

In short, the MARPOR method has experts coders process manifestos into single statements, unitised as quasi-sentences³²⁹. This format is chosen in order to separate potentially unrelated statements which may be contained within one natural sentence³³⁰. Each statement is then assigned to an issue category³³¹, making it possible to compute the relative emphasis a manifesto places on each category³³².

Despite the method's popularity, there is criticism about both the theoretical assumptions and the methodology. For instance, there are claims that the frequency of issues in a manifesto does not translate to saliency or urgency in a reliable way³³³. The dataset is also criticised for containing a number of other political texts such as speeches, letters and advertisements³³⁴, which are typically written in a different manner than manifestos and therefore cannot easily be compared or coded using the same methods³³⁵. Perhaps the most significant complaint is that the 56 issues categories have been kept static for many years. While this maintains comparability, it also means that they risk becoming increasingly irrelevant as political conflicts and landscapes change. Zulianello sees this as MARPOR's key issue: updating and improving the data is not possible without negatively impacting its comparability³³⁶. He therefore speculates that MARPOR's continuing popularity may be partially down to the convenience of an existing dataset that allows the avoidance of labour-intensive data-gathering³³⁷.

Euromanifesto project

The Euromanifesto Project (EMP) studies manifestos of all parties participating in EP elections with the intent of measuring parties' policy positions and issue emphases using a common framework in all Member States³³⁸. The project conducts quantitative content analysis based around the MARPOR methodology³³⁹ modified to fit EU-specific content. The framework is updated for each election³⁴⁰, but according to the researchers, not to the complete detriment of comparability³⁴¹. One of the aspects that sets the EMP apart is that it also codes whether manifesto statements explicitly point to the national level, EU level or neither³⁴².

³²² Volkens, as cited in Zulianello, 2014, p.1723

³²³ Budge et al.; Klingemann et al., as cited in Mikhaylov et al., 2012, p.79

³²⁴ Kostadinova, 2013, p.191

³²⁵ Budge et al.; Klingemann et al., as cited in Krouwel & van Elfrinkhof, 2014, p.1462-1463

³²⁶ Gemenis, 2013, p.3-4; Merz et al., 2016, p.1

³²⁷ Mikhaylov et al., 2012, p.78

³²⁸ Gemenis, 2013, p.3-4

³²⁹ Budge, as cited in Gemenis, 2013, p.3

³³⁰ Merz et al., 2016, p.2

³³¹ Budge, as cited in Gemenis, 2013, p.3

³³² Harmel et al., 2018, p.280

³³³ Laver & Garry, as cited in Krouwel & van Elfrinkhof, 2014, p.1462-1463

³³⁴ Hansen; Gemenis, as cited in Krouwel & van Elfrinkhof, 2014, p.1463

³³⁵ Krouwel & van Elfrinkhof, 2014, p.1463

³³⁶ Zulianello, 2014, p.1734

³³⁷ Zulianello, 2014, p.1723-1724

³³⁸ Schmitt et al., 2016, p.6

³³⁹ Schmitt et al., 2016, p.19

³⁴⁰ Schmitt et al., 2016, p.23

³⁴¹ Schmitt et al., 2016, p.6

³⁴² Schmitt et al., 2016, p.22

Royed & Thomson

The method of identifying pledges and pledge fulfilment popularised by Terry Royed and Robert Thomson has been used by a large number of researchers³⁴³ in studies concerning manifestos from the Netherlands, Ireland, Spain, New Zealand and Sweden³⁴⁴, among others. It is highly relevant for this study due to its focus on specific pledges as a test of the mandate model rather than MARPOR's and EMP's focus on policy positions.

The study's method consists of extracting pledges from manifestos and evaluating them on basis of testability³⁴⁵. Testability is selected as a key factor because it is a prerequisite for being able to assess pledge fulfilment. Pledge extraction is carried out by identifying natural sentences that indicate commitment or support for an action, policy or outcome. These are then coded according to a scheme in order to select pledges that can be assessed for fulfilment:

- Definitive: promises definite action and assessing fulfilment is clear-cut and binary.
- Difficult definitive: promises definite action, and while fulfilment can theoretically be determined, it would require examining both actions and outcomes.
- Judgmental/rhetorical: promises action, but fulfilment cannot be objectively determined (e.g. includes value judgments such as fairness)³⁴⁶.

Pledges coded as definitive or difficult definitive are assessed to see if the pledge was acted out or if its specified outcome was achieved. Judgmental/rhetorical pledges cannot be objectively assessed and are eliminated from the analysis.

Strategy and design

This study consists of an analysis of election pledges in relation to the powers of the EP in order to assess the relevance of these pledges to the election in question. This takes place in six main phases: the collection of documentary data from primary texts and academic sources concerning the powers and competences of the EP; research into coding methods; the development of methodology; the analysis of election manifestos in order to extract and code election pledges according to policy area; the matching of these policy areas to the relevant competence or procedure and its associated EP-powers; and finally, assessing the outcomes of the preceding steps in the context of electoral mandate theory.

Sample

The sample consists of the election manifestos of the nine Dutch parties that were elected to the EP in 2014 (CDA, CU-SGP, D66, GroenLinks, PvdA, PvdD, PVV, SP and VVD). An additional ten Dutch parties participated in this election and failed to gain representation. Their manifestos are excluded from this study in order to limit its scope. Dutch parties were selected over those from other Member States for linguistic reasons while the 2014 elections were chosen because it is still the only full term (2014-2019) to have taken place after the Lisbon Treaty entered into force, which had a significant effect on the powers of the EP. The study's coding validity greatly benefits from looking at a term that has already been completed, as the EP will have done legislative work which directly shows which procedures were used for certain pledges instead of relying on the researcher's assessment.

To further limit the scope of the research, this study only contains pledges from election manifestos rather than also including other channels of party-to-voter communication. Although election manifestos serve as a crucial basis for campaign communication³⁴⁷, the findings of this study therefore do not directly apply to party-to-voter communication as a whole.

³⁴³ Kostadinova, 2013, p.191

³⁴⁴ Thomson, Mansergh, Artés & Bustos, McCluskey, Naurin, as cited in Moury, 2011, p.38

³⁴⁵ Naurin, 2014, p.1051

³⁴⁶ Royed, 1996, p.79-80

³⁴⁷ Eder, Jenny, & Müller, 2017, p.75

The size of the sample limits the generalisability of the findings to other EU Member States as well as to past or future elections. All elections are to a certain extent unique: political cultures; parties and their communication and the political agenda are never stagnant. However, if many factors remain relatively constant (e.g. the Member State and its political culture; the prominence of certain political issues and parties; the public opinion towards the EU), it can be expected that the findings of this study will indicate something about other Dutch EP-election campaigns, particularly those directly preceding and following 2014.

Data collection & analysis

The first phase of the data collection consists of research into primarily academic sources on the topics of EP-powers, mandate theory and pledge coding. This is followed by the extraction of pledges from manifestos. A small sample of manifesto pages is processed twice in order to assess the reliability of pledge extraction. In the analysis stage, the resulting pledges are coded using a scheme which categorises them according to policy area with its associated decision-making procedure and EP powers, as stipulated in the EU treaties and similar texts.

Extracting pledges

Using the findings from the aforementioned research into pledge coding methods, it is possible to systematically extract pledges from the manifestos. Firstly, the manifesto text is converted into useable units of observation. Text sections that focus on ideological principles or past achievements are not included. This also applies to sections such as preambles, introductions, annexes, summaries etc. as these (with very few exceptions) do not contain unique pledges.

This study uses quasi-sentences (QS) as the units of observation. These are identified using the definition “statement about future or desired situation which indicates support for an action or outcome”. QS’s were chosen over shorter (single words or word strings) or longer (natural sentences or paragraphs) units as they offer a compromise between length and brevity. This serves to include sufficient context without coding multiple pledges into one unit and also reduces the impact of writing style (i.e. sentence lengths) which could influence cross-manifesto comparisons. This choice has a positive effect on validity but also decreases reliability due to the introduction of human judgement.

During this process, repetitions of pledges are disregarded and the most detailed version of the pledge is kept. When there is a conflict between the definition above and QS as a strict format, the definition takes precedence, meaning that pledges can potentially span over more than one sentence if they are clearly a core QS accompanied by supporting information.

Distinguishing between pledge and context is a difficult process and is inevitably affected by the coder’s judgment and prior knowledge. In this study, statements are considered to be context rather than pledges if they cannot stand by themselves. Prior knowledge (external information) is used as little as possible as the aim is to identify pledges as they are presented in the manifesto rather than attempting to find a party’s ‘true’ or intended pledge or policy position. Contextual information from the manifesto itself is therefore used as much as possible to increase coding validity.

Assessing pledge testability

As in the Royed & Thomson method (pg. 27), testability is regarded as a key factor because it is a prerequisite for being able to assess pledge fulfilment. Assessing testability is therefore a first step towards testing manifestos against the mandate model, where a higher proportion of testable pledges means closer coherence to the model and a greater ability to create a mandate. It also constitutes a necessary step in the coding process. It is assessed using the following two alternatives:

- Testable = pledge contains criteria that allows its fulfilment to be objectively tested.
- Untestable = pledge does not contain criteria that allows its fulfilment to be objectively tested.

In some cases, a pledge (which cannot be separated into smaller units) may explicitly link an action to an outcome which creates an issue if only one of these is testable. A pledge is therefore, in binary fashion, considered testable if either its action or its outcome is testable. Untestable pledges are not assigned to a category from the coding scheme as they lack the necessary conditions that allow them to be objectively matched to a policy area.

Pledge coding

The coding scheme (table 1, pg. 24) is used to match a subset of testable pledges to (policy) areas with their associated procedures and EP powers. Unless the context specifies otherwise, the assumption will be made that pledges refer to policy at the EU level. The selected subset contains the manifestos' odd-numbered testable pledges (50% of total testable pledges), ensuring an even spread throughout the documents. This results in a significant reduction of workload while having a minimal impact on results.

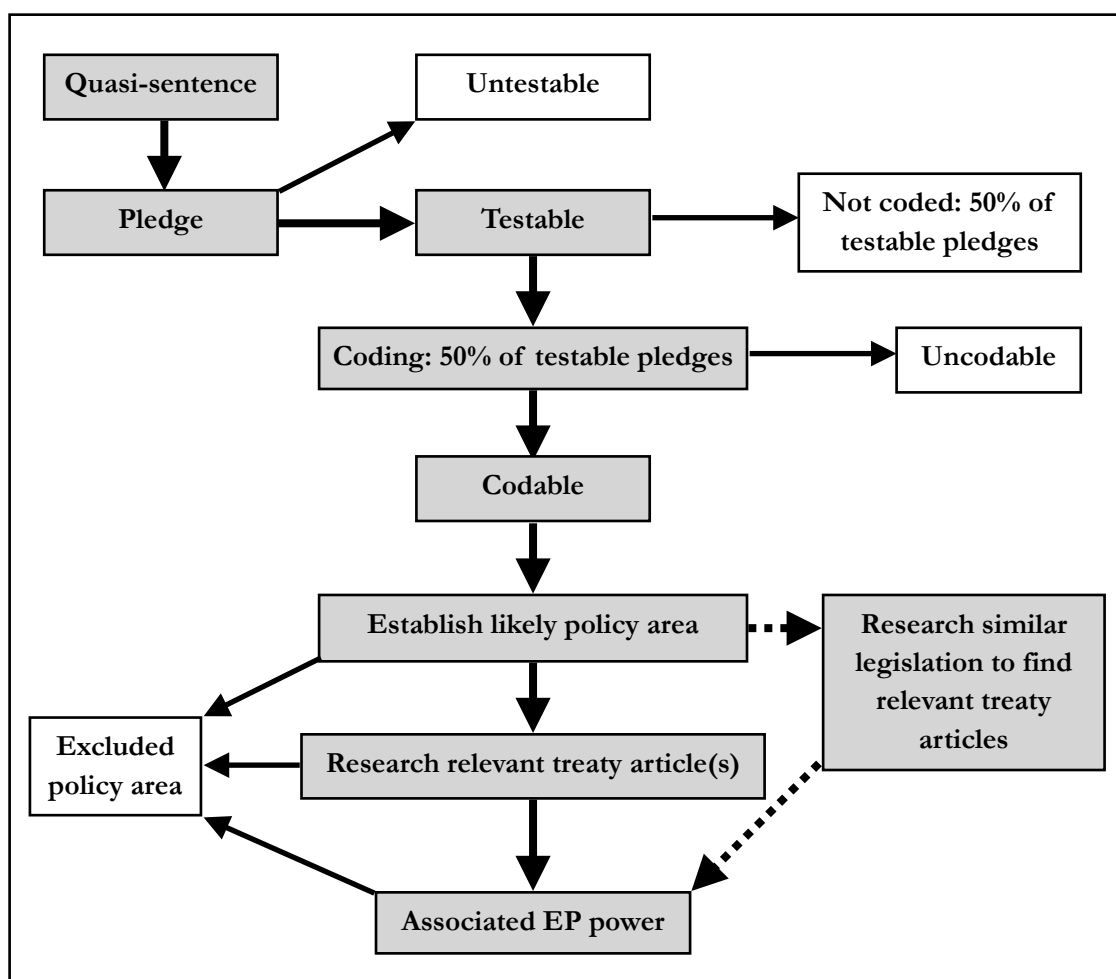


Figure 1. Coding process, from quasi-sentence to EP power

Coding process

In the coding process (Fig. 1), pledges are assigned to (policy) areas based on pre-existing legislation or legislative work in progress, whenever possible. This helps to accurately choose the most relevant policy areas, treaty articles and legislative procedures in cases where several are applicable. In cases where multiple policy areas (with different procedures and EP powers) remain equally relevant, the less uncertain, less complex and more formalised option is chosen. For example, if a pledge requires treaty revision but could also potentially be achieved by an IIA, it will be coded as treaty revision as this requires fewer assumptions from the researcher.

Reliability

This study is conducted using a single coder unlike many similar studies that use multiple coders. This creates the disadvantage of leaving no ability to control coder biases that can potentially impact the reliability of both unitisation and pledge coding. It also leaves a limited scope to feasibly control other types of coding mistakes.

Unitisation reliability testing

To test the reliability of the unitisation method, one randomly selected page per manifesto was processed twice (see pg. 48 Table 4 for detailed results). On first pass, these nine pages were found to contain a total of 148 pledges of which 87 were found to be testable. The second pass found 155 pledges of which 91 were found to be testable. This shows an overall reliability of 95.3% for pledge identification and a reliability of 95.4% for the assessment of testability.

Coding reliability testing

No reliability testing was performed in the coding stage as no appropriate method of reliability testing was available. The method used during the unitisation stage (a second pass of coding) could not be applied because the single-coder method meant that the accumulation of knowledge from the first pass of coding would have significantly impacted the second pass of coding. No other single-coder methods were found to be feasible.

Key variable: Guaranteed EP Impact

The outcome of the coding process is used to assign pledges to new categories for the variable Guaranteed EP Impact. This variable is a necessary step for answering the research question because it shows how significant the EP's impact is guaranteed to be on the decision-making concerning different pledge types. It is also used to show the proportions of these different pledge types within the manifestos. It looks at the EP on an institutional level: i.e. its maximum formal impact. The power of individual MEPs or parties is not taken into account, instead the assumption is made that the required majority is present.

The five categories of the coding scheme are reduced down to three, to provide greater simplicity and focus on the EP's impact. This focus on impact is necessary because it is difficult to draw the line between what is and what is not within the EP's competences due to its ability to have an opinion on virtually anything, which in some circumstances can affect decision-making even in absence of formal EP powers. Practically any pledge can be pursued by use of resolutions and other methods of agenda-setting.

The variable has the following values:

- **Decisive impact** - The EP has veto power and is therefore guaranteed to have a decisive impact on decision-making about pledges of this type (Coding category: Amendment + Veto powers or Veto powers).
- **Minimal or unpredictable impact** - The EP is only guaranteed a minimal impact with a pledge of this type, or it must rely on (unpredictable) influence to have a significant impact (Coding category: Minimal or informal powers).
- **Indeterminable impact** - Pledges of this type are not specific or objective enough to determine how much of an impact the EP can have (Coding category: Uncodable or untestable pledges).

Only pledges in the Amendment + Veto and Veto categories guarantee the EP a decisive impact (veto power). These categories are combined when compared to the coding scheme (pg. 22) as the distinction (the presence of amendment power) is not relevant for answering the research question. Minimal or informal powers will vary between areas or even specific pledges depending on countless factors, but they are consistent in giving neither formal amendment or veto powers. The EP still has formal powers within some areas in this category, so it cannot be said that pledges in this category have no guaranteed impact at all. However, any guaranteed impact

that does exist within these category will be explicitly lesser than veto powers, such as in the Consultation procedure.

Pledges deemed to be uncodable are too ambiguous to match to a coding category, meaning that the EP cannot be guaranteed to have an impact. Likewise, pledges that are untestable cannot be matched to a coding category or policy area, meaning that the EP's powers and impact cannot be established. These categories are combined because, like amendment + veto and veto, the distinction is not relevant for answering the research question. With both types of pledges, the EP's impact cannot be determined. The remaining pledge type from the coding scheme, Excluded, is not used for this variable because these pledges are not assessed and therefore represent an unknown amount of impact for the EP.

4. Results

4.1 Unitisation results

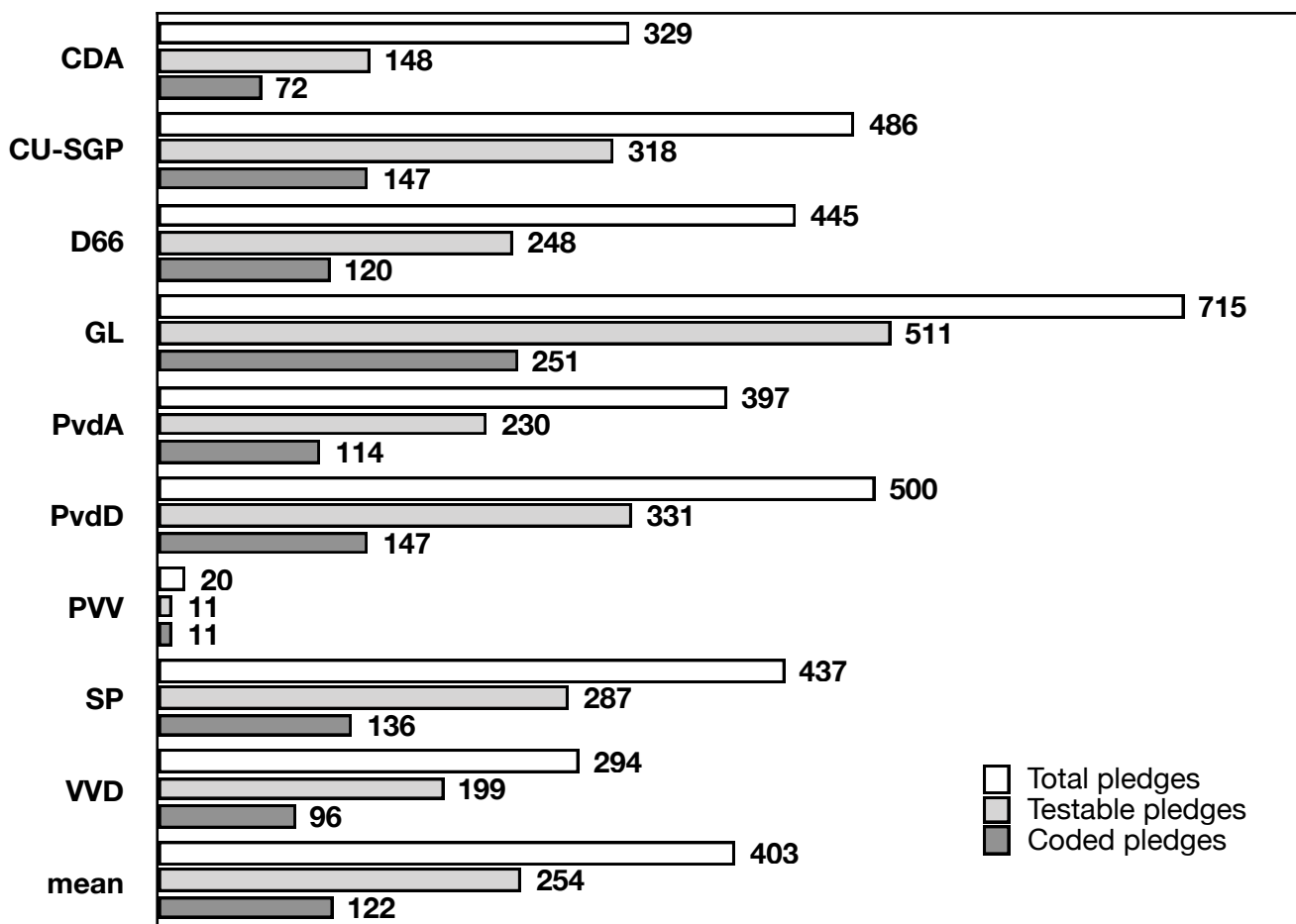


Figure 2. Manifesto pledges - unitisation results (See pg.48 Table 3 for detailed results)

Pledge counts

Pledge counts, shown in Fig. 2, are not in themselves significant but do give an indication about the content of the manifestos. For instance, a manifesto with a low pledge count is likely to contain fewer pledge types. The table shows that the manifesto of GroenLinks contains the most pledges by far (715, nearly twice the mean of 403). PVV shows the other extreme: a pledge count that is only one twentieth of the mean (20). It also shows - most visible with these two parties that represent the extremes - that presenting coding results in absolute numbers instead of proportions would lead to skewed results.

Testability

The number of pledges found to be testable within each manifesto is also visible in Fig. 2. When these are viewed as a proportion of total pledges, there is little variation between parties and most are very close to the mean of 61% (range: 45%-72%). This low variation reflects positively on the consistency of the method used to determine testability, provided that the writing style does not vary widely between manifestos.

Coded pledges

To reduce workload, 50% of testable pledges were assigned to be coded in all but one manifesto. A small number of these were reassessed as untestable during this process, meaning that slightly less than 50% of testable pledges were coded (range: 46.2-49.6%). For the remaining manifesto (PVV), all pledges were coded to avoid reducing its comparatively small amount of testable pledges even further. Fig. 3. shows the number of coded pledges for each manifesto. Due to the method of selecting pledges (numbering all testable pledges, then coding the odd numbers), there is a high likelihood that this did not significantly affect the resulting pledge proportions.

4.2 Coding results

Table 2 shows the mean proportions of pledges in each procedure or (policy) area matched with the associated EP powers. The largest single proportion is that of untestable pledges. Such pledges often use subjective terms which would make it impossible to objectively assess whether the pledge was fulfilled. An example of this is the pledge “we want the EU to be strong in safeguarding our values and interests in the world and to protect us where necessary”³⁴⁸, due to the use of the subjective terms “strong” and “where necessary”.

Uncodable pledges are similar in that they do not contain the criteria that enable them to be assigned to a pledge area, such as by failing to specify an action or policy. An example of this is the pledge “The EU takes steps towards becoming a nuclear-weapon-free zone”³⁴⁹ which does not contain enough information to be coded as being linked to a specific EP power. However, the pledge is testable because it contains enough information to objectively determine fulfilment, i.e. whether the EU maintains the status quo or moves closer towards or further away from a nuclear-weapon-free zone.

Out of the policy areas that can be linked to EP powers, pledges that give the EP amendment and veto powers are by far the most common: on average, one quarter of a manifesto’s pledges. The vast majority of these concern areas that fall within the OLP. For example, environmental policy, as referred to by the pledge “The Nitrates Directive must be abolished”³⁵⁰.

On average, one fifth of pledges concern areas where the EP has minimal or informal powers. For instance, this applies to treaty revision, which is called for by the pledge: “We advocate a single meeting place for the European Parliament on which Members themselves can vote”³⁵¹.

The two smallest categories are pledges concerning areas where the EP has veto powers, such as international agreements, with the pledge: “The EU must cease its attempts to gain tariff-free access to developing nations”³⁵²; and pledges that are unknown because they concern areas excluded from this study. One such example is: “While on duty, the EU’s civil servants and representatives travel by train if the distance is less than 500 km”³⁵³. This pledge could be fulfilled in several ways, but the easiest method would most likely be for institutions to include this in their own statutes, such as by use art. 223 TFEU. This, and similar pledges are excluded due to their lack of relevance to legislation.

³⁴⁸ CDA, 2014, p.31

³⁴⁹ GroenLinks, 2014, p.66

³⁵⁰ VVD, 2014, p.13

³⁵¹ PvdA, 2014, p.28

³⁵² SP, 2014, p.32

³⁵³ PvdD, 2014, p.18

EP powers	Procedure or (policy) area	Proportion (mean)
Amendment + Veto	Ordinary Legislative Procedure	24.7 %
	Annual budget	0.1 %
Veto	SLP: Consent procedure	4.6 %
	Other areas (General passerelles; Enhanced Cooperation; Orange card)	<0.1 %
Minimal or informal powers	MS competence or calls for (sub)national action	8.6 %
	Treaty revision	7.7 %
	CFSP	3.6 %
	SLP: Consultation procedure	0.8 %
	Other minimal / informal powers (Specific passerelles, legislative initiative)	0.1 %
Unknown (Excluded)	Calls for Commission action	2.3 %
	Statute changes	0.5 %
	Other areas (e.g. scrutiny and control; budgetary control and discharge; choice of legal basis; arena function and agenda-setting)	0.4 %
	Appointment	0.1 %
	Delegated Acts and Implementing Acts	0.1 %
	Inter-Institutional Agreements	<0.1 %
Indeterminable (Uncodable)	Uncodable: unclear policy area	7.3 %
Indeterminable (Untestable)	Untestable: cannot be objectively matched to policy areas	39.0 %

Table 2. Pledge policy areas as mean proportions of manifesto pledges (see pg.49 Table 5 for detailed results)

EP powers & pledge types

Fig. 3 shows the mean proportion of the six EP powers in the nine manifestos, shown without the proportion of pledges from excluded areas (see pg.50 Fig. 5 for individual manifesto results). On average, 31% of pledges concern areas with clear and formal EP powers, either in the Amendment + Veto or the Veto categories. 22% of pledges concern areas that do not give the EP significant or formal decision-making powers (Minimal/informal). 48% of pledges lack the specificity (Uncodable) or objectivity (Untestable) that allow them to be matched to a policy area or coding category.

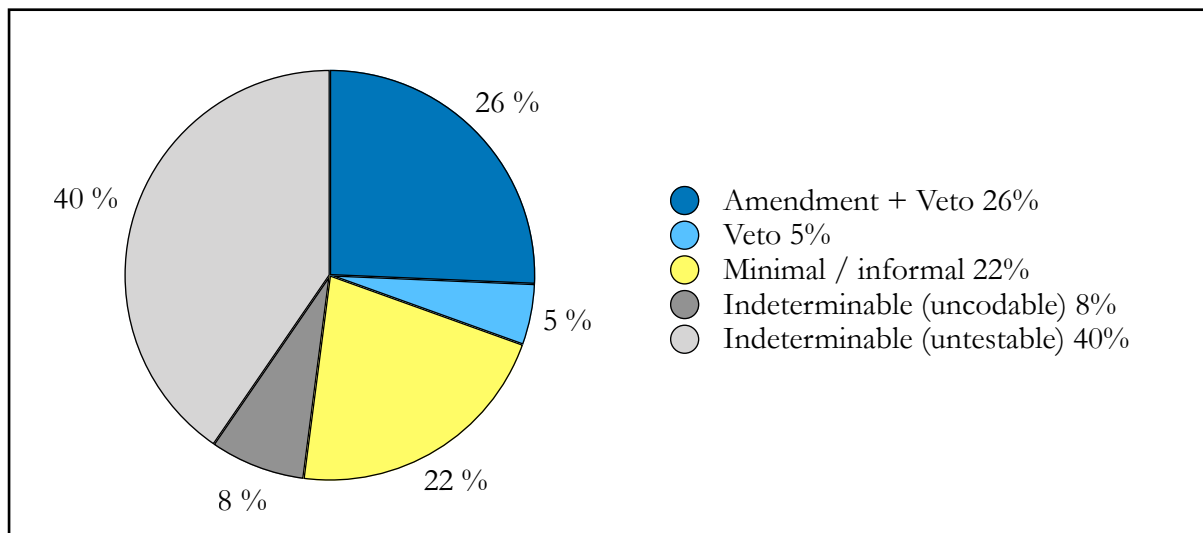


Figure 3. Coding results - pledge types excluding Unknown pledges (mean manifesto proportion)

Guaranteed EP impact

Fig. 4 shows the mean proportions of pledges grouped by their Guaranteed EP Impact (see pg.50 Fig. 6 for individual manifesto results). The five categories from the coding results above are reduced down to three categories to provide greater focus on EP impact which is highly relevant for the research question. For 30% of pledges, the EP is guaranteed to have a decisive impact; for 22%, a minimal or unpredictable impact, and for 48% of pledges, the EP's impact cannot be determined. Pledges from excluded areas are unknown and have therefore been removed as not to provide a skewed result.

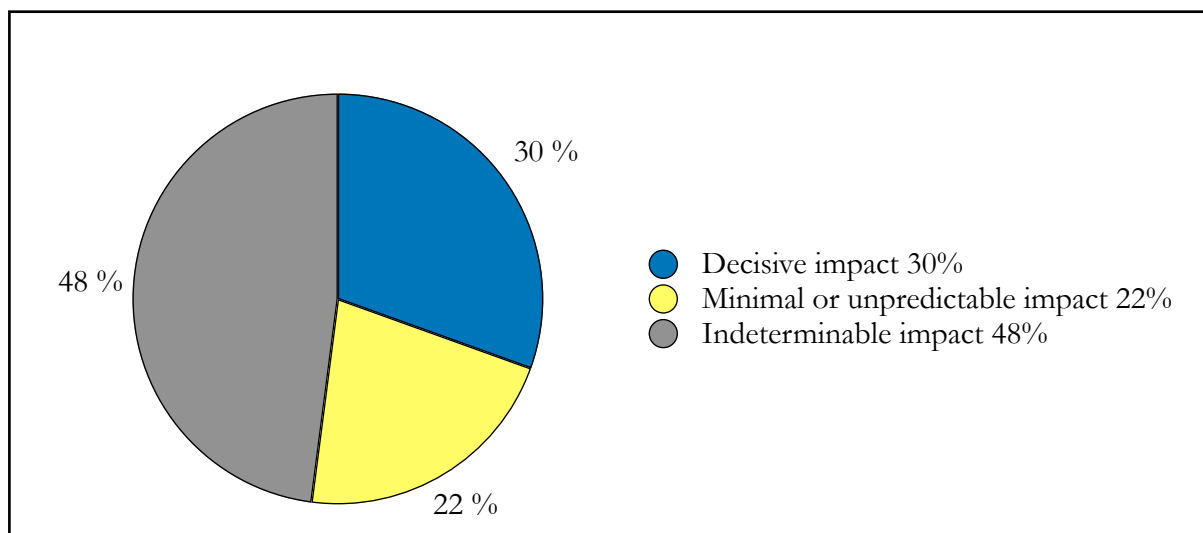


Figure 4. Guaranteed EP Impact excluding Unknown pledges (mean proportion of pledges)

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to see to what extent pledges from EP manifestos corresponded with the powers of the EP and what these findings imply about the election's ability to fulfil its mandate function. To answer this question, a sample of nine Dutch parties from the 2014 elections was used. The pledges from the manifestos of these parties were extracted and assessed using a categorisation system which matched them to treaty articles, statutes, agreements and other texts. These results were used to identify the relevant EP powers and establish to what extent the EP is able to have an impact on decision-making about these pledges.

Subquestions

Answering the research question was done in three steps by use of subquestions. The first part concerns the powers of the EP at the time of the 2014 elections. Chapter 2.2 shows these powers and the associated procedures and policy areas summarised for use with this study's pledges. Most relevant to pledges and their fulfilment are the legislation procedures and the choice of legislative procedure as these are decisive for the impact that the EP will have on decision-making.

The second subquestion concerns the pledges from the nine manifestos and how these fit into procedures and (policy) areas derived from EU treaties, agreements and rules. The pledges from the nine manifestos were found to fit into a number of distinct areas which were incorporated into a coding scheme (pg. 22). Two of these areas were a grouping of areas for (a small number of) pledges that were too precise to be uncodable but not precise enough to define as a discrete area. This showed that the vast majority of (testable and codable) pledges fall within the areas of the OLP. The second-most common pledge types were pledges that call for treaty changes or that concern areas that fall within Member State competence.

The third subquestion concerns the amount of decision-making impact that the EP's powers allow it to have on the pledges from the manifestos. Pledges that fit into the excluded category are removed from consideration as they have not been assessed in terms of the EP's impact. There can be no doubt that pledges in areas that confer the EP veto powers are highly relevant and give the EP an impactful role (30% of total). On the other end of the spectrum are the untestable and uncodable pledges (48% of total) which are written in such a way as to make it impossible to determine the EP's role. To voters, pledges of this type give little indication as to what a party will do after an election, while to parties themselves, they do not provide concrete goals. The third large pledge type is that which belongs to the areas that give the EP minimal or informal powers. Pledges of this type can be interpreted in different ways and there is no definitive answer to whether the EP's impact should be assessed favourably or unfavourably.

When assessed favourably, pledges in areas where the EP must rely on minimal or informal powers are viewed as giving the EP an impactful role. The argument in favour of this view is that the EP has on occasion proven that it can have an impactful role even in areas where it lacks formal powers. However, this is not consistently the case across policy areas and situations. If this category of pledges is added to those with veto powers this would mean that, on average, 52% of manifesto pledges give the EP an impactful role. As a result, the EP lacks impact with 48% of pledges.

When assessed more unfavourably, pledges in areas where the EP must rely on minimal or informal powers are not counted as giving the EP an impactful role. This means that only pledges in areas that give the EP veto powers will be viewed as impactful: on average, 30% of manifesto pledges. This would mean that the EP lacks impact with at least 70% of pledges.

Main research question

The main research consists of two parts. Firstly, it concerns the extent to which the pledges correspond with the powers of the EP. There is a small group of pledges that were excluded due to their complexity, in which the EP may or may not have relevant powers or its powers are unclear. Out of the remaining pledges, 30% give the EP veto powers and therefore fit squarely within the EP's primary powers. 22% of pledges concern areas that give the EP little to no formal powers and where it must rely on influence to have an impact on decision-making. The match between these pledges and EP powers is more than zero, but the EP's role can never be guaranteed to be significant. A large proportion of pledges (48%) are written in a way that do not allow them to be matched to an EP power.

Secondly, the research question concerns these findings' implications for the ability of these elections to fulfil their mandate function. Looking at the requirements of the mandate model, there are no structural reasons why

the EP cannot fulfil these as long as it is viewed using the representation perspective, where focus is placed on parties' policy-pursuing actions rather than a government's policy output. In the case of these manifestos, all pledges except those that are too ambiguous to be testable or codable can be counted. This leaves 52% of pledges that parties can attempt to fulfil.

As a result, the maximum potential pledge fulfilment is 52%. Without a standard to compare against, it is impossible to say whether this is enough to create a mandate. When considering the extremes, it is possible to say a manifesto with 0% of pledges being relevant and fulfillable cannot give a mandate, while a manifesto with 100% of pledges being relevant and fulfillable gives a clear and indisputable mandate. Evidently the cross-over is somewhere between these two points. Finding an appropriate standard to compare against can be done by looking at evidence from other elections. For instance, previous studies focusing on a number of European countries and political systems found that government parties fulfilled a majority of their (national) election pledges, meaning that at least half of their pledges can be objectively assessed for fulfilment. This number comes from the national level (with governing parties) and is therefore not a perfect comparison, but it does provide a mandate threshold to compare against.

This study will therefore use 50% as its threshold for its pledge-output link. If a majority of pledges is relevant and can be fulfilled, a mandate is created because there is enough of a potential pledge-output link. If less than a majority of pledges cannot be fulfilled or is not relevant, the mandate is not created as there is not enough of a pledge-output link possible. Taking this standard into account, two alternatives are possible:

1. In the ideal scenario, these parties can be bound to and can potentially fulfil 52% of their pledges. This requires the assumption that the EP can have a decisive impact in areas where it lacks significant powers. This scenario places these manifestos marginally above the 50% threshold mentioned above, essentially placing them at the absolute minimum level for mandate creation.
2. In a more realistic scenario, where the EP is not assumed to have decisive influence in areas where it does not have significant powers, the potential maximum fulfilment is closer to 30%. This low proportion does not come close to the 50% standard set and makes it difficult to argue in favour of the possibility of a strong pledge-output link.

In practice the answer is likely to lie between the two scenarios because while the EP has on occasion been proven to influence decision-making outside of its (main) powers, there is no evidence to suggest it does so consistently and across the board. The true proportion of relevant and fulfillable pledges is therefore highly likely to lie below the threshold of 50%, meaning that the potential maximum pledge fulfilment is also highly likely to lie below 50%. As the creation of a mandate requires a strong pledge-output link, it can be said that these manifestos at this election fail to create a mandate because they fail to express the will of the European people on European issues in the policy areas where the EP has competence³⁵⁴. Therefore, Dutch voters were not able to give a mandate in the 2014 elections.

Implications

The results of this study are in line with previous research that show that EP elections typically place limited attention on issues that are relevant for the EP and its decision-making powers. Many pledges therefore have limited relevance to this election, either because they are too imprecise to be fulfillable or because they are relevant for a different level of governance or decision-maker. This means that the manifestos fail to fulfil their external function (communicating with voters) and by extension, their internal function (providing direction for MEPs).

³⁵⁴ Mair & Thomassen, 2008, p.8-9

The impact of informal powers brings nuance to this conclusion, because while a policy area may be outside of the EP's core competences, it is incorrect to state that particular areas are entirely outside of the full range of competences. The EP has functions that allow it to attempt to influence almost anything. However, parties overstate their own and the EP's impact when presenting pledges that the EP cannot fulfil. Likewise, understating the EP's powers is also easily done by overlooking the role played by informal power.

The results also show, judging by the large proportions of untestable pledges, that parties are not overly interested in the type of mandate that requires specific action in the form of fulfilment of pledges. This could mean that they are instead mainly intending to seek permission to act as a representative for their voters' best interest³⁵⁵. It is unclear which type of mandate is seen as most appropriate by voters, especially since voters may view it differently than at the national level. It is also unclear whether voters are aware of how few EP-election pledges can actually be fulfilled by the EP.

Limitations

This study has a number of limitations caused by its limited sample and its focus on pledges. Other limitations are caused by some of the choices made to limit the scope and reduce complexity of the coding process, such as the exclusion of informal power and the exclusion of certain policy areas.

Sample

This study excluded the manifestos of the ten parties that were not elected in 2014, most of which did not have representation at any level at the time of the elections. Examining more data for possible correlations between manifesto content, (sub-)national representation and EP election result could have led to interesting findings. Furthermore, the study only included one election and only one Member State, making it unclear how representative these results and conclusions are for the rest of the EU and for other elections.

The focus on manifestos misses the nuances or details that are included in other communication channels and means that the findings of this study do not apply to party-to-voter communication as a whole. The focus on pledges further excludes nuances (especially from non-pledge sections) and reduces manifestos down to a pledge delivery method. This also interferes with comparisons between manifestos that may use non-pledge sections differently.

Application of mandate theory

Mandate is not a uniform concept and can be applied in multiple ways. This study used the interpretation that sees mandate as being a requirement to take specific action rather than a (looser) permission to represent voters. This raises the bar for an election to create a mandate as it ignores factors like ideological principles and instead implies a stricter requirement for pledges to be specific and fulfillable. Additionally, this study used the representation- instead of the government perspective, as this perspective is not applicable to the EP because the elections do not directly lead to the formation of a government.

Coding reliability

The use of a single coder is the largest shortcoming of the methodology as there is no system of controlling coder biases. This will impact both unitisation and pledge coding and also leaves a very limited scope to feasibly control coding mistakes. The re-assessment of one page per manifesto to test pledge identification and testability assessment found a reliability of just over 95%, but the use of a single coder means that this finding is of limited value. Any coder biases that may have affected the first pass of coding are very likely to also have affected the second pass. Instead, it primarily shows that the unitisation method is sufficiently well-defined as to be almost entirely consistent.

³⁵⁵ Grossback, Peterson & Stimson, 2007, p.712

Additionally, the lack of reliability testing in the coding stage means that the coding reliability cannot be accurately expressed. However, repeatability in coding is almost certainly better than in unitisation as coding categories were largely unambiguous and the method used for coding by comparing with previous or ongoing legislation leaves little room for interpretation.

In terms of unitisation, the use of loose quasi-sentences is inherently less objective than a strict exogenous definition because it creates the issue of distinguishing between discrete pledges and context. The assessment of testability also has an unavoidable subjective component. However, any feasible alternative method would have sacrificed validity for the sake of reliability.

Coding sample and method

Only a portion of testable pledges were coded in order to decrease workload. Using more testable pledges will lead to more accurate results, but there are diminishing returns. The aim of 50% is an arbitrary number but it is unlikely that additional pledges would have changed results to any significant degree considering the evenly spread selection of pledges.

The method of coding pledges was in most cases based on pre-existing legislation or ongoing legislative work in the same policy area. The remaining pledges were coded using the closest possible legislation as a reference. As a result, the impact of subjectivity in choosing the most appropriate coding category is minimal. For pledges that did not have a single, objectively most relevant category, the category associated with the less uncertain, less complex or more formalised option was chosen. These factors were not objectively quantified, therefore this assessment has a subjective component.

Informal power

Although EU politics has a high degree of informal politics and informal powers have the potential to be decisive, it is considered to be outside of the scope of study. This is entirely due to complexity: it is extremely difficult to reliably measure influence, especially in a wide range of situations and policy areas. An additional issue is that it is difficult to accurately pinpoint where the EP's competences end because it has the ability to have an opinion on virtually anything. In some circumstances this can affect decision-making even in absence of formal EP powers.

This creates a limitation for the coding scheme: the omission of informal power as a component in all policy areas or procedures. It results in the exclusion of certain powers where the EP must rely on influence to affect outcomes (e.g. agenda-setting) and causes formal powers to be oversimplified. For instance, it also necessitates the exclusion of legislative initiative as a factor in the pledge coding (a key factor in most coding categories) to prevent creating an unrepresentative and overly negative view of EP powers. Ignoring the legislative initiative in this study means that EP powers will instead be slightly overestimated. This de-emphasis on informal powers as discrete powers caused them to be categorised together with minimal, albeit formal, powers. Ideally these would have been split into two categories to allow greater detail in the results and conclusion.

Excluded pledges

A number of areas were excluded despite giving the EP formal powers. Some of these areas were selected because they specifically contain too much complexity or rely too much on informal processes that do not include a well-defined role for the EP. This includes Inter-Institutional Agreements; choice of legal basis; Delegated acts and Implementing acts; statutes of the EP or other institutions; the EP's arena function, agenda-setting, scrutiny and (budgetary) control. Choice of legal basis stands out as being one of the largest omissions, as it can be highly important for the impact of the EP. However, due to its complexity it was not a feasible inclusion for a study of this size. Excluded pledges were very uncommon in this sample, only adding up to 3.4% of (testable) pledges. Therefore, this omission will only have had a minor impact on the results and conclusion of this study.

Recommendations

In terms of improving the methodology, there are three points which would clearly lead to large improvements:

- Coding should be done using multiple coders as this decreases the potential for coder bias and coding mistakes having an influence on the results.
- Informal powers should, to a greater extent, be included when assessing the EP's guaranteed impact. The EP's influence is likely to be larger and more consistent in some areas than in others. This would increase the scope of a study significantly as each power, function, procedure and sometimes policy area would have to be researched in detail.
- More communication channels should be included. Although manifestos serve as the basis of an election campaign, they rarely reach voters directly and are therefore not fully representative of the communication between parties and voters.

Follow-up research would be beneficial if this study was repeated using other Member States and other elections. Previous research seems to suggest that results would not be dissimilar, but only with a significantly increased sample size would it become possible to draw conclusions about the elections as a whole.

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7. Appendix

Manifesto	Pledges	Words (nearest hundred)	Words per pledge	Testable pledges	Testability	Coded pledges (% of testable)
CDA	329	7400	22.49	148	45.0 %	72 (48.6%)
CU-SGP	486	19800	40.74	318	65.4 %	147 (46.2%)
D66	445	11700	26.29	248	55.4 %	120 (48.4%)
GroenLinks	715	24500	34.27	511	71.5 %	251 (49.1%)
PvdA	397	11000	27.71	230	57.9 %	114 (49.6%)
PvdD	500	14800	29.60	331	66.2 %	147 (44.4%)
PVV	20	300	15.00	11	55.0 %	11 (100%)
SP	437	13400	30.66	287	65.7 %	136 (47.4%)
VVD	294	9500	32.31	199	67.7 %	96 (48.2%)
Mean	403	12500	29	254	61 %	53.5 %

Table 3. Unitisation results

Unitisation reliability testing	CDA pg.13	PVV pg.1	PvdA pg.29	VVD pg.28	D66 pg.27	GL pg.10	SP pg.8	CU-SGP pg.18	PvdD pg.11
First pass (unitisation): testable pledges/total pledges (testability%)	7/15 (46.7%)	11/20 (55%)	8/13 (61.5%)	14/22 (63.6%)	9/16 (56.3%)	4/7 (57.1%)	17/28 (60.7%)	7/12 (58.3%)	10/15 (66.7%)
Second pass (test): testable pledges/total pledges (testability%)	8/17 (47.1%)	9/16 (56.3%)	10/18 (55.6%)	15/23 (65.2%)	10/16 (62.5%)	5/8 (62.5%)	17/26 (65.4%)	8/13 (61.5%)	9/18 (50%)
Testable pledges change	+1 (14.3%)	-2 (18.2%)	+2 (25%)	+1 (7.1%)	+1 (11%)	+1 (25%)	0	+1 (14.3%)	-1 (10%)
Total pledges change	+2 (13.3%)	-4 (20%)	+5 (35.7%)	+1 (4.5%)	0	+1 (14.3%)	-2 (7.1%)	+1 (8.3%)	+3 (20%)

Table 4. Unitisation reliability testing results

Coding results (testable pledges)											
EP powers	Procedure	CDA	CU-SGP	D66	GL	PvdA	PvdD	PVV	SP	VVD	MEAN
Amendment + veto	OLP	29 (40%)	66 (44.9%)	47 (39.2%)	113 (45%)	43 (37.7%)	92 (57.5%)	-	67 (49.3%)	49 (51%)	40.5%
	Annual budget	-	1 (0.7%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1%
Veto	SLP: Consent	6 (8.3%)	12 (8.2%)	14 (11.7%)	13 (5.2%)	10 (8.8%)	9 (5.6%)	-	13 (9.6%)	10 (10.4%)	7.5%
Minimal or informal	SLP: Consultation	1 (1.4%)	-	-	8 (3.2%)	2 (1.8%)	2 (1.3%)	-	3 (2.2%)	2 (2.1%)	1.3%
	CFSP	5 (6.9%)	12 (8.2%)	9 (7.5%)	27 (10.8%)	9 (7.9%)	11 (6.9%)	-	4 (2.9%)	2 (2.1%)	5.9%
	Treaty revision	4 (5.6%)	17 (11.6%)	13 (10.8%)	25 (10%)	7 (6.1%)	13 (8.1%)	4 (36.4%)	22 (16.2%)	9 (9.4%)	12.7%
	Other minimal / informal powers	-	-	-	-	2 (1.8%)	-	-	-	-	0.2%
	MS competence or call for (sub)national action	10 (13.9%)	14 (9.5%)	14 (11.7%)	18 (7.2%)	14 (12.3%)	8 (5%)	6 (54.5%)	6 (4.4%)	8 (8.3%)	14.1%
Indeterminable (Excluded areas)	Call for Commission action	4 (5.6%)	6 (4.1%)	3 (2.5%)	10 (4%)	6 (5.3%)	3 (1.9%)	-	2 (1.5%)	9 (9.4%)	3.8%
	Delegated acts & implementing acts	1 (1.4%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.2%
	Inter-institutional agreements	-	-	-	1 (0.4%)	-	-	-	-	-	0%
	Appointment	-	1 (0.7%)	1 (0.8%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.2%
	Statute changes	2 (2.8%)	-	1 (0.8%)	3 (1.2%)	2 (1.8%)	1 (0.6%)	-	-	-	0.8%
	Other excluded areas	1 (1.4%)	3 (2%)	-	1 (0.4%)	2 (1.8%)	1 (0.6%)	-	-	-	0.7%
Indeterminable (Uncodable pledges)	Uncodable (unclear action or policy)	9 (12.5%)	15 (10.2%)	18 (15%)	32 (12.7%)	17 (14.9%)	20 (12.5%)	1 (9.1%)	19 (14%)	7 (7.3%)	12%
Total coded pledges		72	147	120	251	114	160	11	136	96	

Table 5. Coding results (individual manifestos)

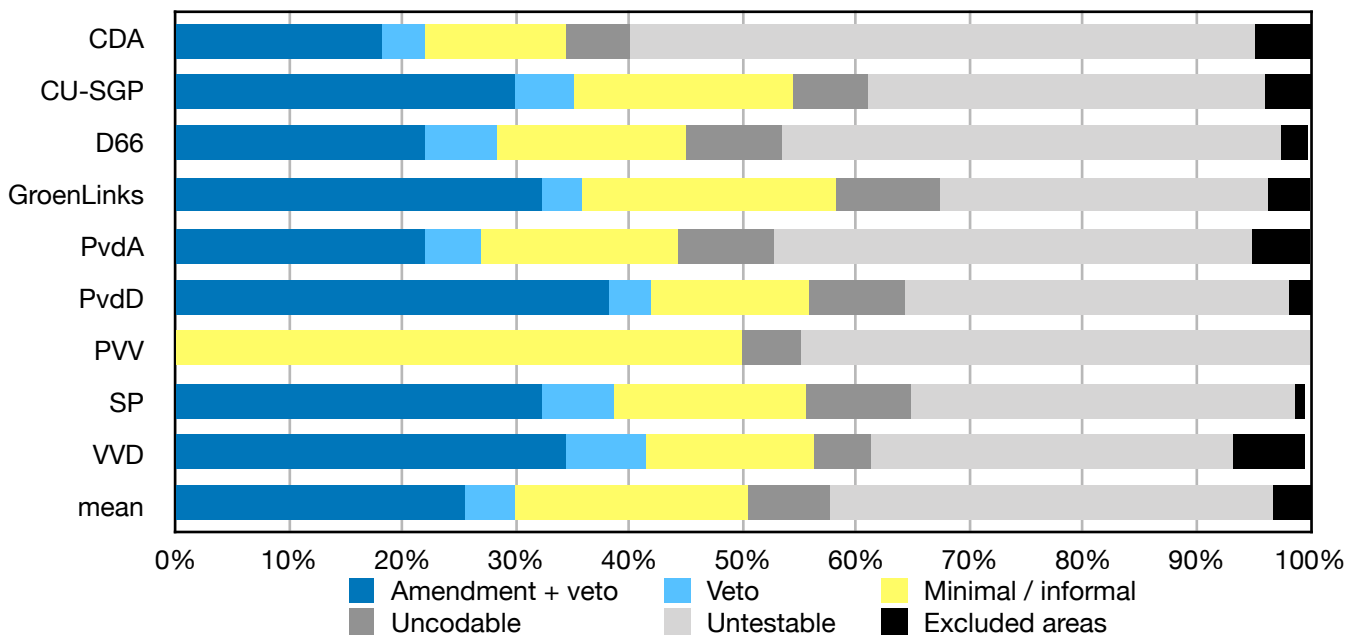


Figure 5. Coding results (individual manifestos)

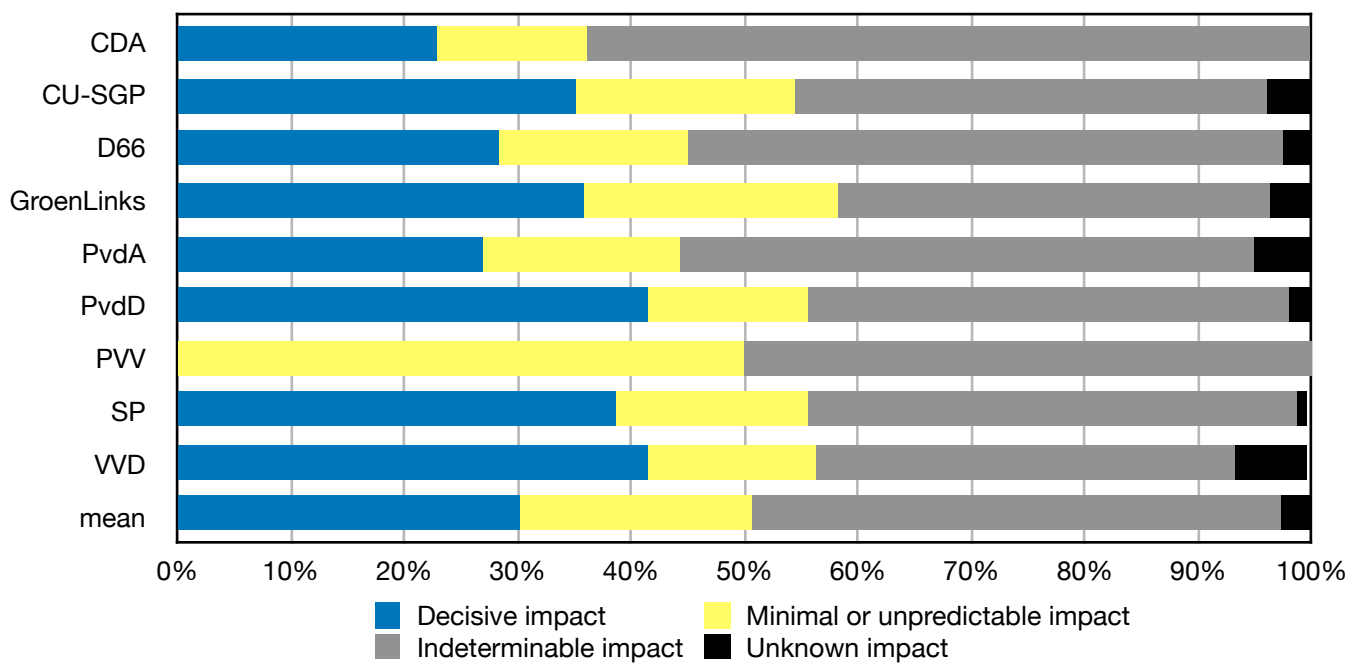


Figure 6. Guaranteed EP Impact (individual manifestos)