

You Have Got Mail! A Field Experiment on Legislator Responsiveness in the European Parliament

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Legislator Responsiveness in Revisited

- **Point of Departure:** When legislators are likely to be responsive to information from their constituents? Recent empirical evidence, primarily based on field experiments, seems to provide two different answers to this question?
- **Electoral Incentives:** Legislators are vote seekers who respond if this increases chances of re-election (Grose 2010, Butler and Nickerson 2011, Dropp and Peskowitz 2012)
- **Norms & Beliefs:** Legislators act based on norms and beliefs and respond with to expressing group loyalties or comply to group norm (Butler and Broockman 2011, Broockman, 2013, Faller, Nathan and White 2014)
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Our Contribution

- We conduct field experiment in the EP which is unique laboratory as legislators within same parliament face very different electoral rules
- On the 29th of November 2013 real voters emailed all 766 MEPs in 7th Parliament (2009-2014) in their own name asking them for information & content randomized based on intrinsic motivations
- **Outcome:** response within 4 weeks (excluding holidays) [next: response content]
- To our knowledge, first ever field experiment within the EP, specifically important in the EU case as only the EP is the directly elected legislature in EU
- **Two Questions:** Do legislators respond to voter messages, and if so to which messages? To what extent can intrinsic and extrinsic motivations account for the variation in legislator responsiveness?

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Why Would Individual MEPs Respond?

- 1 **Intrinsic Motivations:** legislators will respond due to internal norms and beliefs with the aim of expressing certain group loyalties or complying to certain group norms (see also Mansbridge 1999)
 - **Response Hypothesis H1:** MEPs who have been socialized in the EP longer, are more likely to respond
 - **Response Hypothesis H2:** MEPs who hold stronger ideological beliefs are more likely to respond
 - **Message Content Hypothesis H3:** MEPs who have been socialized in the EP longer, are more likely to respond to left/right messages
 - **Message Content Hypothesis H4:** MEPs who hold stronger ideological beliefs, are more likely to respond to messages congruent with those beliefs

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Why Would Individual MEPs Respond?

- 1 **Extrinsic Motivation:** legislators are first and foremost be vote seekers and are responsive when it enhances re-election prospects (see Mayhew 1974)
 - **Response Hypothesis H5:** MEPs who face stronger electoral incentives, who are up for re-election and running in open list systems, are more likely to respond
 - **Message Content Hypothesis H6:** MEPs who face stronger electoral incentives, who are up for re-election and running in open list systems, are less likely to respond to electorally unpopular messages
 - **Message Content Hypothesis H7:** MEPs with European career aspirations will respond more to respond to EU messages, while those with national aspiration more to national messages

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- Voters from 28 member states [students from Universities of Oxford & Nottingham] who are eligible to vote in upcoming EP elections
- They sent an email in their own language to an MEP from their own country [ethically approved at Oxford]
- They were paid 10 GBP for participation which was based on consent
- Matched with data on preferences of individual MEPs with 2010 EPRG Survey by Farrell, Hix & Scully 2010 [due to small n statistical power is an issue]

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- MEPs were randomly assigned to four treatment conditions triggering intrinsic motivations:
 - ① left-EU email message
 - ② right-EU email message
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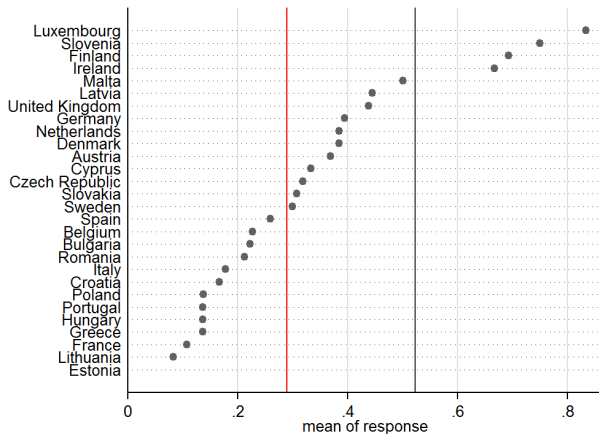
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Dear [Name MEP],

My name is [Name Voter]. I am trying to decide who to vote for in the upcoming EP elections and would like to get some more information. I am well aware that there are many challenges that face us today, but I am particularly worried about the growing *social inequality/ public debt* in the *UK/ EU*. I think that the *Cameron Government/ Barroso Commission* should do something about it. For example, it should *increase social expenditure/ tighten the budget* in the coming years. I would like to know if you have taken any actions to do so recently or if you have plans to do so in the future. Thank you very much in advance.

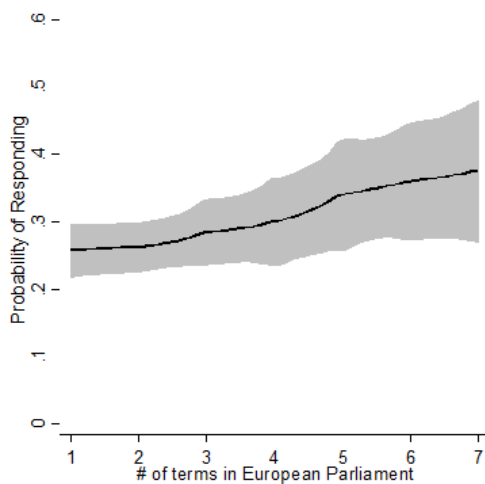
Best wishes,
[Name Voter]

Modest Response Rate

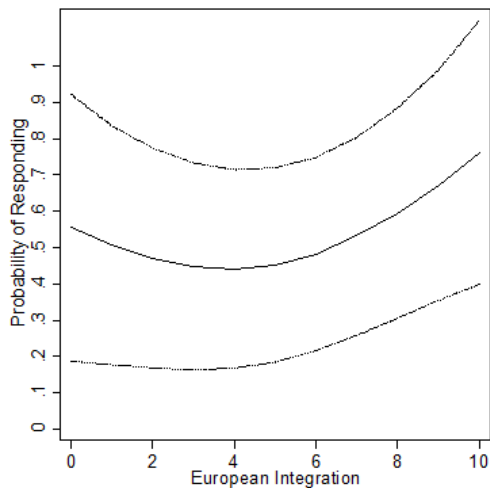


Overall response rate of **28.3 percent**, less compared to US studies (Butler and Brockman 2011, Brockman, 2013)

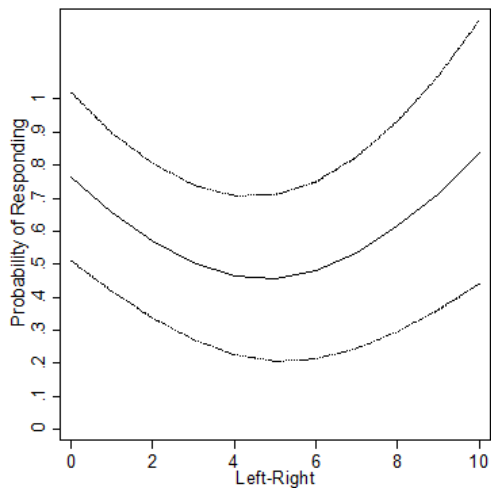
Response: Intrinsic Motivations H1



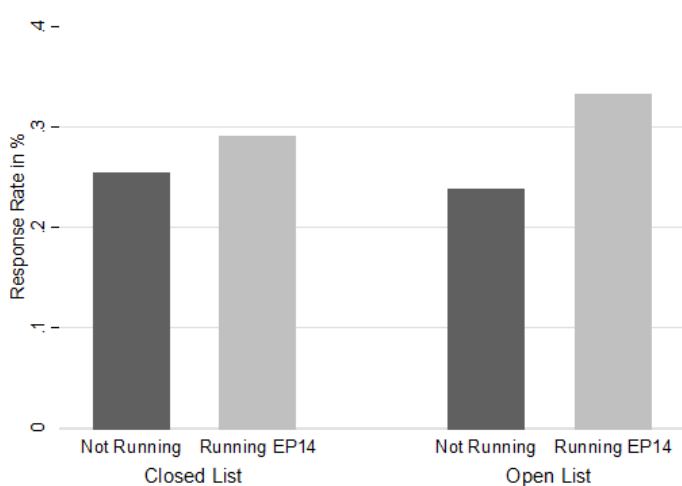
Response: Intrinsic Motivations H2



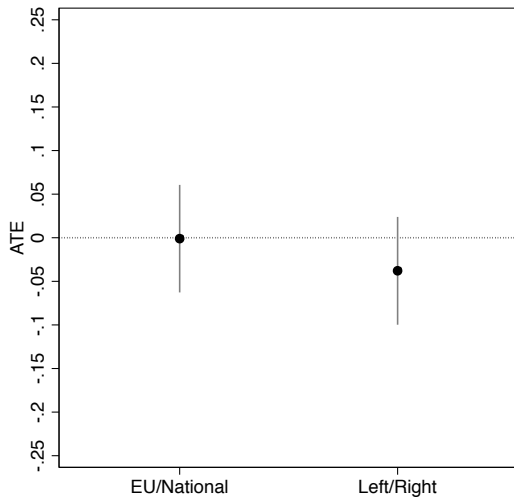
Response: Intrinsic Motivations H2



Response: Extrinsic Motivations H5

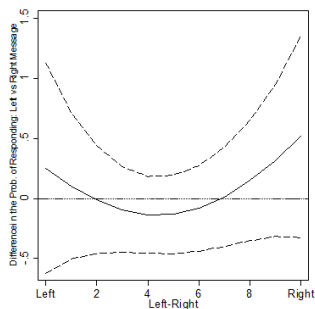


No Bias in Reponse to Message Content

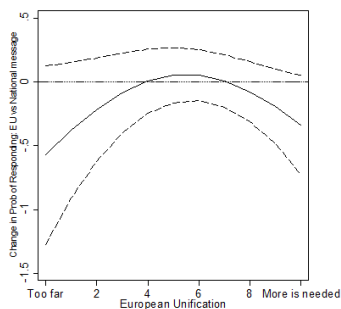


Message Content: Intrinsic Motivations H3 & H4

Left Message



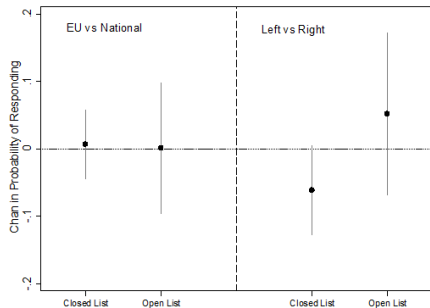
EU Message



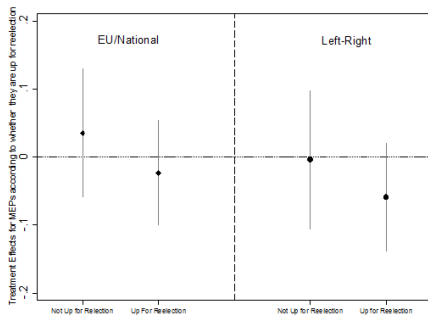
No evidence for H3 that socialization affects response to message content differently

Message Content: Extrinsic Motivations H6

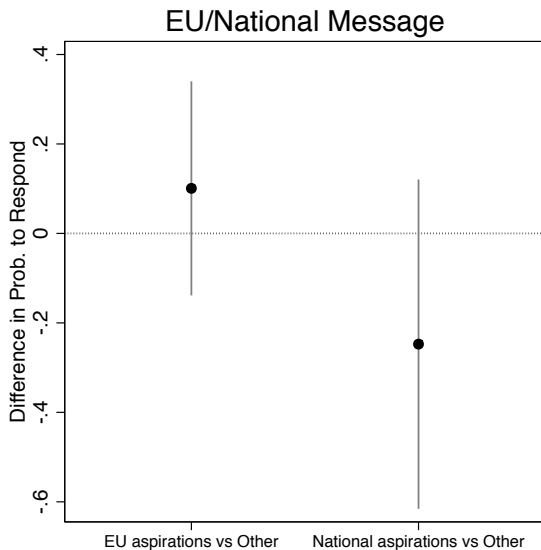
Open/Closed List



Re-Election



Message Content: Extrinsic Motivations H7



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- 2 Yet, when MEPs respond, they are unbiased in their responses to voter concerns
- 3 **Extensive individual heterogeneity exists:** Extrinsic motivations based on electoral incentives and intrinsic motivations due socialization increase MEP responsiveness
- 4 Important insights for legislative scholars suggesting that existinn work on legislator responsiveness might have underestimated the importance of intrinsic motivations
- 5 Novel evidence for scholars of EP which shows that claims of MEPs being somewhat unresponsive to voters might be warranted to some extent, especially compared to US legislators

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