

Giebler, Heiko; Wagner, Aiko

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## Contrasting first- and second-order electoral behaviour: determinants of individual party choice in European and German Federal elections

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## **Contrasting First- and Second-Order Electoral Behaviour: Determinants of Individual Party Choice in European and German Federal Elections**

Heiko Giebler, Aiko Wagner

**Abstract:** In contrast to national elections, both parties and voters are assumed to think that 'less is at stake' in European elections: Campaigns are less intense, turnout is lower, and citizens are more inclined to 'vote with their hearts'. The latter should be reflected in differing rationales of voting – party choice should not be based on identical determinants in national and European elections. However, this hypothesis has not been sufficiently tested and most of the research is based on the analysis of aggregated data while causal explanations are located on the micro level. This paper compares vote functions of individuals in regard to the 2009 European Parliament election as well as the 2009 German Federal election. Using data from the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES), comparison of explanatory models shows that party choice on both levels is neither fundamentally different nor does it fit into the pattern of second-order electoral behaviour.

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### **ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AS *SECOND-ORDER NATIONAL ELECTIONS***

Since 1979, the European Parliament (EP) is elected by the citizens of the European Union. The direct election of parliamentarians was – and still is – aimed at increasing the legitimacy and societal acceptance of European institutions and, consequently, to reduce the (perception of a) democratic deficit at the European level. It was initially hoped that those developments would be based on supranational electoral behaviour which is primarily shaped by European issues.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, the European political arena is a supplement to and not a substitute for existing national and even sub-national arenas. This multilevel structure of European democracy has serious consequences on governance, policies and political behaviour of both citizens and politicians. Over time, the political levels became more and more closely linked. The nature of the linkage was less one of interdependency but one of asymmetric dependency in favour of the national level. Especially the role of the European Parliament had been negligible until its powers were increased, for example, in regard to co-legislation. Nevertheless, in comparison to the role of national parliaments in the member countries, the European Parliament stays a minor player in the institutional setting of the European Union.

The hope to decrease the democratic deficit of the European Union was already challenged by the first analysis of the 1979 election by Reif and Schmitt:<sup>2</sup> the electoral

results were determined by national factors to an overwhelming degree. This finding led to a characterisation of European elections as second-order national elections<sup>3</sup> or barometer elections:<sup>4</sup>

Many voters cast their votes in these elections not only as a result of conditions obtaining within the specific context of the second-order arena, but also on the basis of factors in the main political arena of the nation. [...] Perhaps the most important aspect of second-order elections is that there is less at stake.<sup>5</sup>

In regard to the democratic quality of European elections, this finding has severe implications. The dependency on national determinants undermines the representational function of the European Parliament as a supranational institution in its own right and it restrains the genesis of a genuine European party system.<sup>6</sup> A classical purpose of democratic elections is to hold the body of representatives accountable for their decisions and behaviour. Because individual voting behaviour is primarily based on domestic considerations and not on genuine European ones, European elections cannot adequately fulfil this purpose.<sup>7</sup>

Not only voters but also parties and the media perceive European elections as less important.<sup>8</sup> As a consequence, the expected benefits of winning the election are reduced making individual turnout, intense and expensive campaigns, as well as extensive media coverage less likely.<sup>9</sup> There are significant differences between countries in terms of media coverage or the magnitude of electoral campaigns but they are still second-order in comparison to national elections.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, European elections are characterised by lower turnout, losses for governing and bigger parties, and vote gains for smaller and/or radical parties. This pattern is more or less stable even after three decades.<sup>11</sup> The amounts of gains and losses of votes are primarily determined by the positioning of the European election within the national electoral cycle.<sup>12</sup> These deviations can be explained either by the specific relevance of the European election<sup>13</sup> or by factors related to mobilisation.<sup>14</sup>

Interestingly, most analyses on the second-order character of European elections are not conducted on the micro level but on the level of aggregated data in spite of the fact that the explanations of differences between national and European elections are, at least implicitly, based on individual behaviour.<sup>15</sup> Hence, the danger of an ecological fallacy occurs.

Studies in the context of turnout have already proven the usefulness of a micro-level approach complementing research on the macro level.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, this paper builds on existing micro-level analyses on party choice in European Parliament elections.<sup>17</sup> However, there is only a small number of micro-level studies on party choice directly assessing the validity of second-order arguments. Moreover, these studies focus on explaining (quasi-)vote switching or different reasons for voting for the government or the opposition. They neither control for diverging electorates, nor do they present and compare statistical models for elections on both levels. In regard to the applied empirical models, it can be stated that explanatory models specifically relying on the second-order theory are more commonly used to explain party choice in EP elections than classical models of electoral behaviour, for example the Michigan model.<sup>18</sup> Congruence between model specifications is indispensable in a comparison between elections aiming on a classification as first- or second-order. Put simply, we

can only verify that European elections are second-order elections if the analysis is conducted on the micro level and overcomes the aforementioned shortcomings. Thus, the key question of this paper is whether the second-order character of European elections can be confirmed if the assessment is based on a direct comparison of appropriate and identical explanatory models on the micro level for both elections.

The paper progresses as follows: first, a brief overview of earlier studies, their theoretical arguments and basic results is presented. This enables the formulation of testable micro-level hypotheses. Because vote functions are extremely useful to identify differences between elections, the empirical analyses focus on the comparison of vote functions in accordance to the Michigan model. The hypotheses are then tested for the 2009 European and national parliament elections in Germany using data from the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES). Finally, we summarise the empirical results and discuss potential consequences of our findings for the second-order approach as well as for future research.

## THE MICRO FOUNDATIONS OF THE SECOND-ORDER THEORY

While there is a substantial body of literature analysing elections to the European Parliament with aggregated data, the number of studies on the micro level is rather small. One potential explanation is that the most obvious characteristics of second-order elections become visible on the macro level, for example the losses of incumbent parties. Nevertheless, most of the proposed explanations of these characteristics are based on assumptions on individual behaviour. Thus, micro-level approaches addressing turnout in European elections have significantly increased our understanding of second-order elections.<sup>19</sup> However, most of the existing literature is less clear as to why big and governing parties are losing in favour of small, extremist, and opposition parties.

Using a second-order approach, any variation of electoral results must be ascribed to a corresponding variation of electoral behaviour and not, for example, to institutional differences. The European Parliament constitutes the only transnational institution allowing for different electoral systems for each state's delegates on the one hand and which is directly elected on the other.<sup>20</sup> Even more important, there is not just variation between countries on the European level but between electoral systems applied in national and European elections in one and the same country. The institutional effects on electoral behaviour have to be separated from the effects of different rationales of voting. Only the latter are consistent with the second-order approach.

In terms of rationales of voting, Schmitt *et al.*<sup>21</sup> distinguish two explanatory approaches: (1) systematic differences of party choice; and (2) systematic differences of individual turnout. For example, many citizens who vote for the governing party in the national election do not participate in the secondary election, thereby systematically depriving the governing party of support. This results in losses for the government and in respective gains for the opposition in European elections. In the literature on mid-term elections in the USA, this phenomenon is associated with the terms *surge and decline*.<sup>22</sup> However, the better performance of extremist parties on the European level cannot be related to this finding because these parties still win more votes when a model controls for incumbency effects. Additionally, the implicit

arguments about individual voting behaviour in European elections focus on the effects of vote switching and, to a much lesser degree, on turnout.<sup>23</sup>

Consequently, systematic differences in party choice must be linked to different rationales. In their study on vote switching, Carruba and Timpone<sup>24</sup> restrict their sample to people voting in both elections. They argue that unsatisfied voters punish governing parties in European elections because these elections are perceived to be of lesser importance. Hence, voters articulate their dissatisfaction with the government's performance under the assumption that this may pressure parties to change national policies. They (mis-)use second-order elections as referenda elections by *voting with the boot*.<sup>25</sup> A second logic of decision making is associated with the term *voting with the heart*: in second-order elections, where less is at stake (e.g. because they do not result in government formation) citizens can cast their vote more sincerely.<sup>26</sup> In this case, *sincere* means voting for the party whose policy preferences are the closest to the preferences of the individual. The third rationale, namely, *voting with the head* is far less common in second-order elections. Two different types of strategic voting are subsumed under this logic: on the one hand, it refers to electoral behaviour shaped by electoral systems,<sup>27</sup> especially to the fact that people try to avoid wasting their votes. On the other hand, it is associated with the co-determination of party choice by supposed or preferred government coalitions. The prevalent perception of European elections as minor events and the fact that no government or governing coalition is elected reduces the probability of behaviour along those two lines. In sum, second-order elections should be characterised to a higher degree by voting with the *heart* or with the *boot* and this should lead to deviations between elections on both levels.

These micro-level explanations deduced from second-order theory are far from undisputed. Several other perspectives on vote switching have been brought forward in the literature. For example, Fiorina<sup>28</sup> introduced the *balancing-hypothesis*. If one assumes that (a) citizens prefer policies over mere incumbency of specific parties and (b) that they ascribe similar levels of relevance to the national and European arenas then moderate voters should alternate between parties. In consequence, they would be able to ensure policies balanced to their own, moderate position. According to this argument, vote switching occurs, but such behaviour cannot be explained by relying on the classical second-order framework.

A second approach simply assumes that voters either have different policy preferences on different levels or that they consider level-specific solutions more adequate for level-specific issues.<sup>29</sup> Green parties represent a perfect example for this assumption. If a voter likes the idea of sustainable policies but thinks at the same time that economic growth and prosperity in his or her country is of equal importance, it would be perfectly rational to vote for an ecological party on the European level. This would increase the probability of the implementation of framework legislation for all member states. In the national election, this voter would cast his or her vote for a party which he or she thinks is capable in terms of economic policies. To ensure the fulfilment of both policy preferences, sincere voting is possible even if both elections are considered to be equally relevant: 'There is no reason to presume that individuals should vote the same in the two elections just because they consider both important.'<sup>30</sup>

Finally, there is a rather straightforward reason for vote switching between elections: preferences change because individual attitudes or (perceived) party positions are changing. The assumption of identical party choice in two elections might be foiled because a citizen's opinion on good policies, the personal situation he or she is in and public perception of political parties are not stable over time. Vote switching caused by changed preferences or utilities gives no information about the *second-orderedness* of European elections.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the mere existence of vote switching is not a sufficient condition for the second-order character of elections.

In accordance to Rohrschneider and Clark's<sup>32</sup> transfer-hypothesis, electoral behaviour in European elections is second-order electoral behaviour if and only if voters' decisions primarily depend on national-level issues. Hence, the confirmation of the second-order character of European elections has to be based on the relevance of national characteristics and their superior importance in comparison to genuine European characteristics. Otherwise, any analysis would be in danger of interpreting empirical results in favour of the second-order theory although these effects might be caused by first-order arguments described above. For example, it is argued that small parties win because voters are punishing (bigger) parties in government due to their performance on the national level. At the same time, individuals might vote for these parties not because of their size but because they are perceived to do a better job in the European Parliament. Only a comparative test of both hypotheses would be able to untangle this problem.

This paper offers an even more conservative approach to second-order elections than Rohrschneider and Clark because the utilisation of national evaluations does not offer clear proof for the *second-orderedness* of the European level. Building on the work of Downs, Fiorina<sup>33</sup> and others who argue that voters tend to use many different sources to assess the future performance of parties, it seems reasonable to assume that individuals quite naturally combine information regardless of the political level it is based on. Irwin's<sup>34</sup> observation that, more or less, there is no distinction between national and European party systems further supports this assumption. In this sense, elections on both levels are not completely independent from each other, but this is not evidence for the proposed subordinated character of European elections.

To avoid the discussed weaknesses, this study focuses directly on voters' decision-making processes. Accordingly, the reformulated second-order hypothesis simply states that these processes should differ systematically between the two levels. The resulting pattern must be consistent with an increased proportion of voting with the heart or with the boot in European elections that is sincere or protest voting. In sum, a valid test should be based on identical statistical models of party choice – not just a distinction between parties in government and opposition parties – and on their direct comparison. Moreover, only individuals who have voted in both elections can be taken into account. This leads to three rather general hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Elements used to measure sincere voting are of higher importance (in regard to explanatory power) in European elections.

Hypothesis 2: In European elections, genuine European factors are less relevant than genuine national factors.

Hypothesis 3: The evaluation of national governments' performance is highly important for party choice in European elections.

A careful and thorough test of the second-order model on the micro level could be guided by more than just these three hypotheses. As the theoretical section has shown, there is a plethora of assumptions in regard to second-order electoral behaviour. Additionally, voting is determined by a vast number of factors. Restricted by space and data availability, this article focuses on the three most important aspects. It seems reasonable to assume that the confirmation of those hypotheses is a necessary condition for second-orderness.

To compare electoral behaviour, the concept of vote functions taken from the literature on economic voting is applied.<sup>35</sup> Vote functions explicitly enable a comparison of behaviour in different elections. They are defined as the combination of factors determining electoral behaviour with sufficiently high accuracy. If the statistical analyses identify different vote functions – either in terms of explained variance or the relative explanatory power of single elements – there is certain evidence that voters follow different calculations.

#### CASE SELECTION AND OPERATIONALISATION

In the following section, the presented hypotheses will be tested for the 2009 European election in Germany and the election to the German Bundestag a few months later. The data are taken from the second wave of the Online-Tracking by the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) which provides information on vote intentions for both elections.<sup>36</sup> Generally, there are four possible combinations of voting/non-voting if a set of two elections is analysed. First, there are citizens who do not participate in either of the elections. This group is of no further interest for the argumentation because this paper targets explanations of party choice and not explanations of electoral participation. Second, as a comparison of national and European turnout rates shows, voting in European elections only is extremely rare. A third possible combination is a national-level voter who does not vote in EU-level elections. However, neither the second nor the third group should be included because the corresponding information regarding the second election is missing. If the analysed sample is not constant between elections, researchers cannot preclude effects of different turnout on their results. Any deviation between national and European electoral behaviour might then be subsumed under the not very spectacular statement *different electorates, different electoral results*. Therefore, only an analysis of the fourth group, people voting in both elections, is of real interest and able to produce undistorted results. For this reason, the focus of this paper is only on individuals who intend to vote in both elections.<sup>37</sup> Because turnout in European elections is generally low, this leaves us with only 487 cases.<sup>38</sup> In Germany in 2009, turnout was only about 43 per cent and this was reflected in the survey responses as well.

One could object to the selection of this case because it seems unlikely that second-order effects will be in place. Basically, there are three sources of possible variation: (1) incentives set by differing electoral systems; (2) variation on the *supply side*, meaning different party systems on both levels; and (3) different determinants of

party choice. A comparison between national and European elections in Germany shows that there are moderate or even no differences in regard to the first two sources. In contrast to other European countries like France or the UK, the electoral systems on both levels differ only slightly which decreases distortions based on institutional differences. At the same time, there are no German *European parties* as there are, for example, in Austria. As this paper – as well as the classical approaches to second-order elections in the tradition of Reif and Schmitt<sup>39</sup> – focuses on individual voting behaviour and its determinants, the underlying case seems to be ideal. Differences between national and European election results depending on variation of electoral institutions and/or variation on the supply side are not sufficient for defining second-order elections. Rather, the characterisation has to be based on a third possible source: level-specific determinants of party choice. In other words: European elections are second-order elections if the underlying rationales of voters differ significantly from those at work in national elections.

It has to be mentioned that the 2009 elections in Germany are exceptional with regard to two aspects. First, the national election was conducted shortly after the European election. As earlier studies have shown, second-order effects are most prominent if the European election takes place in the middle of the national electoral cycle.<sup>40</sup> Hence, second-order effects should be relatively weak. Furthermore, Germany was governed by a grand coalition (CDU/CSU and SPD) which discourages *voting with the boot* because there is no completely new government waiting to step in. Such a coalition meant that at least one of the governing parties would be part of the newly formed government. Consequently, all results are built not only on the aforementioned conservative theoretical assumptions but also on a conservative case selection while highlighting individual voting behaviour. If second-order effects can be identified in the 2009 elections in Germany, where all signs point to the opposite, the findings should be very reliable and valid.

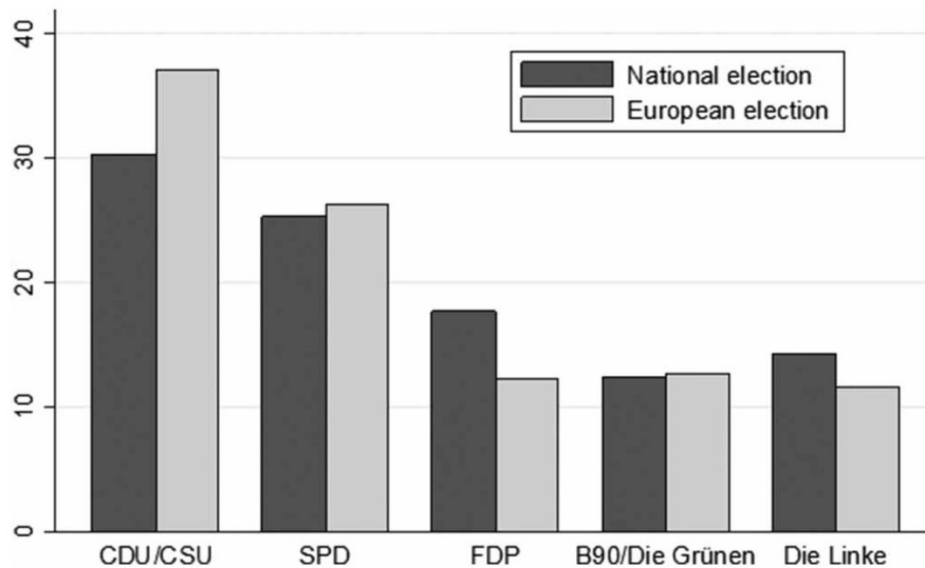
As a first step, Figure 1 presents the percentages of intended votes for each of the five major parties in the upcoming national and European elections. Following the strategy outlined above, only those respondents have been taken into account who intended to participate in both elections.

The second-order approach assumes that big parties in national governments lose while small parties of the opposition win votes in comparison to national elections. As the 2009 European elections took place only three-and-a-half months before the election to the Bundestag, these expected differences should be relatively small but nevertheless exist. Clearly, this is not the case: both parties in government – CDU/CSU and SPD – have a higher vote share in the European election than in the national election. Of the small parties in the opposition, only Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (the Greens) shows higher percentages on the European level but the difference is very small. The aggregated results presented in Figure 1 already indicate that a restriction to individuals voting in both elections – which is necessary to investigate whether there are second-order effects on party choice – sheds doubts on the second-orderness of European elections for the case of Germany. Nevertheless, a reliable analysis has to be conducted on the micro level.

To explain party choice on the micro level, a modified version of the Michigan model,<sup>41</sup> one of the dominant paradigms in electoral research, is used here. The



FIGURE 1  
COMPARISON OF VOTE INTENTIONS FOR NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2009



Source: Authors' own calculations based on German Longitudinal Election Study – Langfrist-Online-Tracking, T2, Version: 4.0.0, doi: 10.4232/1.10830.

model includes the 'usual suspects':<sup>42</sup> party identification as well as evaluations of the top candidates of all relevant parties for both elections.<sup>43</sup> The personalisation of politics is a frequently discussed topic in Germany, although a trend towards personalisation cannot be clearly determined. For example, recent research has found that while leaders matter for vote choice party evaluations are still more important and leaders' impact depends on the respective party evaluation.<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, Reif and Schmitt<sup>45</sup> already considered top candidates important. They identified a positive effect of well-known and popular candidates on electoral results.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, party differentials for the left/right *super-issue* are used.<sup>47</sup> This dimension is described as the most important landmark for political competition.<sup>48</sup> To incorporate the European dimension into the model, similar differentials were calculated in regard to the question of (further) European integration.<sup>49</sup> The evaluation of the national economic performance of governments plays an important role in the second-order literature<sup>50</sup> and as well for party choice in national elections.<sup>51</sup>

Accordingly, retrospective evaluation of economic performance has to be taken into account. However, this paper proposes a slight re-specification: the effect of these evaluations is conditional to the ascription of responsibility to the governing parties' policies. Governing parties should lose votes only if the evaluation of their economic record is bad and they are seen to be responsible for the developments. Variables measuring directly strategic voting are not included. Nevertheless, the results of the applied model provide information on the amount of apparent strategic voting. Strategic voting should be more prominent in national elections. If this is the case, the model consisting of affective, evaluative and issue components should perform

less well for national elections. This would be pictured by a poorer model fit. In simplified terms, we model the decision-making process for a certain party as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{VOTE INTENTION} &= \text{PARTY IDENTIFICATION (PID)} \\ &+ \text{LEFT/RIGHT DIFFERENTIAL} + \text{EU} \\ &- \text{INTEGRATION DIFFERENTIAL} \\ &+ \text{EVALUATION OF EUROPEAN CANDIDATES} \\ &+ \text{EVALUATION OF NATIONAL CANDIDATES} \\ &+ \text{ASCRIED RESPONSIBILITY FOR ECONOMIC} \\ &\quad \text{DEVELOPMENT (ECONOMY)} \\ &+ \text{PARTY IN GOVERNMENT} \end{aligned}$$

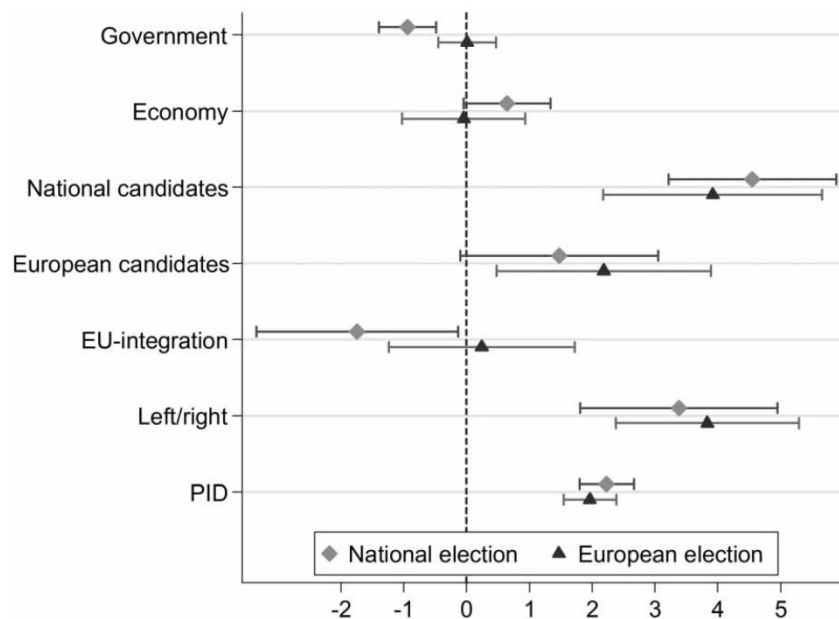
## RESULTS

In this paper, a stacked data matrix is used for the analyses.<sup>52</sup> The stacked data matrix consists of N (number of respondents) multiplied with P (number of parties) observations.<sup>53</sup> For the underlying analyses, this creates five observations (one for each of the major parties) for each respondent. This approach enables the simultaneous estimation of the aforementioned equation for all parties, resulting in an *overall* coefficient for each predictor variable. Hence, the advantage of a stacked data matrix in regard to the guiding question of this paper is rather obvious: the focus is not on specific parties but on a comprehensive identification and comparison of party choice rationales.

To simplify the comparison of the conditional logistic regression models on both levels, this study draws on a graphical presentation of results.<sup>54</sup> In each of the following figures, the coefficients – diamonds used for national and triangles used for European elections – and the respective 95 per cent confidence intervals are shown. The independent variables have been rescaled between 0 and 1. This allows not only for a direct comparison between the vote functions on both levels but also between the relevance of each predictor.<sup>55</sup> If the line representing the confidence interval intersects the dashed, vertical line, the coefficient is not significant at the 5 per cent level.

In the following, three different samples are analysed to validate the three hypotheses. As a first step, the sample is restricted to individuals who intended to vote in both elections. This model specification follows directly from the theoretical considerations on how to identify *true* second-order electoral behaviour. Second, the more common but flawed strategy of an unrestricted sample is applied. The thus estimated results can help to visualise the problematic nature of such a design. Finally, the regression models are run for vote switchers only. Second-order electoral behaviour is supposed to be most observed in the group of individuals who voted for different parties in the European and the national elections. If the last kind of model does not yield results supporting the hypotheses, the second-order character of European elections can be rejected for the 2009 elections in Germany.

FIGURE 2  
COMPARISON OF CONDITIONAL LOGIT-COEFFICIENTS OF MODEL 1 (NATIONAL ELECTION) AND  
2 ( EUROPEAN ELECTION)



Note: All variables have been rescaled between 0 and 1. The x-axis depicts the size of the conditional logit coefficient (diamonds for national, triangles for European elections). If the 95 per cent confidence intervals (represented by the whiskers) cross the vertical, dashed line, the coefficient is not significantly different from zero.

Source: Authors' own calculations based on German Longitudinal Election Study – Langfrist-Online-Tracking, T2, Version: 4.0.0, doi: 10.4232/1.10830.

The modified Michigan model in use yields a good model fit for the stacked data matrix of all people voting in both elections (Figure 2; Model 1 and 2 in Table A1). For both elections, close to 92 per cent of the cases are predicted correctly and McFadden's pseudo-R2 values are about .65. Because both models predict voters' behaviour equally well, one can conclude that the amount of strategic voting is similar in both elections. Therefore, a second-order character in this respect cannot be confirmed.

Party identification plays an important role in both models as do the left/right party differentials: there is no real difference between the two models in regard to effect size and significance levels. As a consequence, there is no evidence for more *voting with the heart* in European elections which contradicts Hypothesis 1 and, therefore, the characterisation as second-order elections. Interestingly, the rather identical effects of the left/right party differentials disagree with another finding of the second-order literature: extremist parties are supposed to win more votes in European elections.<sup>56</sup> Due to the fact that the distribution on the left/right scale in the sample is not skewed and because it shows a high kurtosis, the predictive power of the left/right party differentials would have to be significantly smaller in the European election model to support this proposition.

Hypothesis 2 states that the EU-integration party differentials should be of less relevance in both models to confirm the by-election character of European elections. In

contrast to other studies on the micro level,<sup>57</sup> this is obviously the case because the coefficient is not significantly different from zero, at least in regard to the European election. Interestingly, higher proximity leads to a lower chance of voting in national elections. Voters are not relying on congruence to party positions on the matter of EU-integration in the way classical proximity theory would suggest.<sup>58</sup> The irrelevance is further emphasised by the fact that the left/right party differentials are clearly dominant. However, a comparison of the influence of party differentials in both models leads to the rejection of Hypothesis 1. Sincere voting is not stronger in European elections.

The candidate evaluations produce a rather surprising result: European candidates are indeed important for party choice in European elections. Still, the pattern supports the by-election character of European elections. While national candidates have a fairly strong effect in both elections, there is no significant effect of European candidates in national elections. Additionally, the impact of national candidates is bigger than the respective impact of European candidates even in elections to the European Parliament.

Finally, the retrospective evaluation of the economic developments has no significant effect in either election, whereas the effect of incumbency has an impact on party choice, albeit only in national elections. The latter might be a result of the – then in power – grand coalition. Controlling for all other factors, voters tend to cast their vote with a lower probability for the CDU/CSU and the SPD.<sup>59</sup> By-election assumptions suggest a similar but stronger effect in European elections but the coefficient is not significantly different from zero. *Voting with the boot* in the context of economic developments has no effect on party choice, neither in the national nor in the European election.<sup>60</sup>

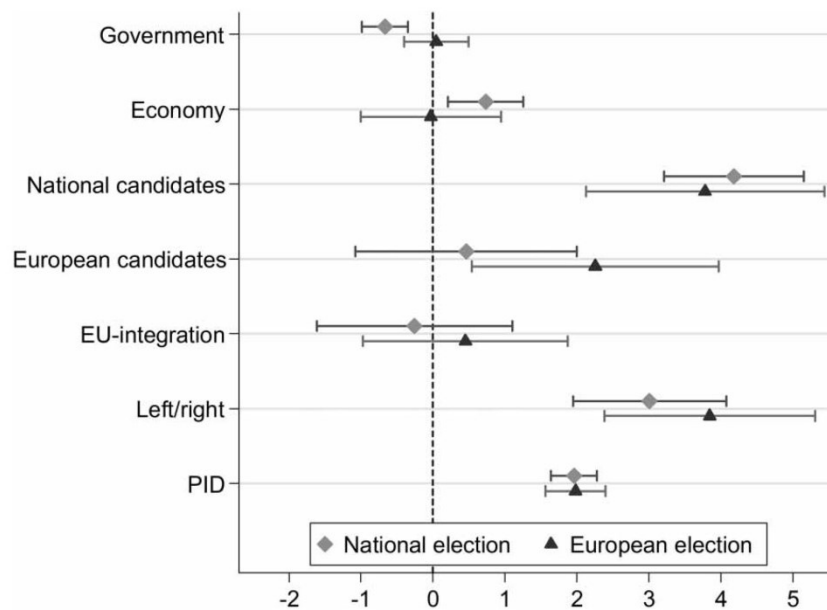
All in all, the results show only minor evidence for European elections as second-order national elections. Decision-making processes do not differ significantly between the two levels and parties in government are only punished by voters in national elections. The high importance of national candidates in European elections can be described as the only exception to this over-all pattern.

To emphasise the argumentation that only people who voted or intend to vote in both elections should be taken into account, Figure 3 presents the results for an unrestricted sample (Model 3 for the Bundestag election, Model 4 for the EP election; Table A2). Now, voters participating in only one of the elections are included as well. In terms of goodness-of-fit, both models perform very well. There is a slightly bigger difference in regard to the McFadden-R2 in comparison to Model 1 and 2 (.57 for Model 3 and .66 for Model 4).<sup>61</sup> Still, this is no clear sign for more sincere and less strategic voting in the European election.

There are some differences concerning the level of statistical significance compared to Models 1 and 2. In contrast to the findings based on a sample of only those voting in both elections, the coefficients of party identification and the left/right party differential are not identical. The coefficients are slightly bigger in the model explaining vote choice in European elections which may indicate more voting with the heart. To a certain degree, the unrestricted sample leads to a slight overestimation of second-orderedness.

As for the restricted sample, national candidates are more important – even in the EP election – than their European equivalents. The question whether European integration should be pushed further plays no role for party choice. Again, there are differences in

FIGURE 3  
COMPARISON OF CONDITIONAL LOGIT-COEFFICIENTS OF MODEL 3 (NATIONAL ELECTION)  
AND 4 (EUROPEAN ELECTION)



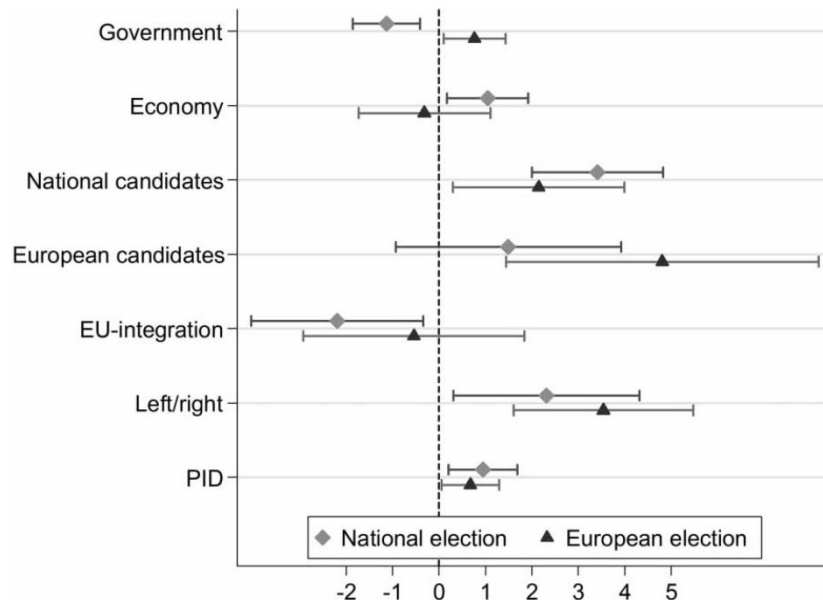
Note: All variables have been rescaled between 0 and 1. The x-axis depicts the size of the conditional logit coefficient (diamonds for national, triangles for European elections). If the 95 per cent confidence intervals (represented by the whiskers) cross the vertical, dashed line, the coefficient is not significantly different from zero.

Source: Authors' own calculations based on German Longitudinal Election Study – Langfrist-Online-Tracking, T2, Version: 4.0.0, doi: 10.4232/1.10830.

the vote functions when it comes to incumbency and economic voting as well. However, the empirical evidence suggests that voters punish parties in government and take economic evaluations into account only in national elections. The second-order character of European elections is even more doubtful because of the (nearly) identical effects of party identification and the left/right party differentials.

If the different levels of turnout are controlled for, any deviations in regard to the vote functions have to be based on vote switching.<sup>62</sup> Vote switching between national and European elections is quite common. In the underlying data set, about 30 per cent of the respondents fall into this group. The analysis of the vote functions of vote switchers cannot further confirm the second-orderness of European elections (Figure 4; Table A3). First of all, party identification is again important in both models but its impact is small in comparison to Models 1 to 4. For voting in European elections, party identification is even only barely significant. Not very surprisingly, vote switchers rely to a lesser degree on party identification. The left/right party differentials are again somewhat more important for European elections. EU-integration party differentials play no role for voting for the European Parliament. But once again, they exert a surprisingly negative effect on party choice for the Bundestag election. Identical to Model 1, the higher the proximity in terms of European integration, the lower is the probability to vote for a party.

FIGURE 4  
COMPARISON OF CONDITIONAL LOGIT-COEFFICIENTS OF MODEL 5 (NATIONAL ELECTION)  
AND 6 (EUROPEAN ELECTION) – SUB-SAMPLE OF VOTE SWITCHERS



Note: All variables have been rescaled between 0 and 1. The x-axis depicts the size of the conditional logit coefficient (diamonds for national, triangles for European elections). If the 95 per cent confidence intervals (represented by the whiskers) cross the vertical, dashed line, the coefficient is not significantly different from zero.

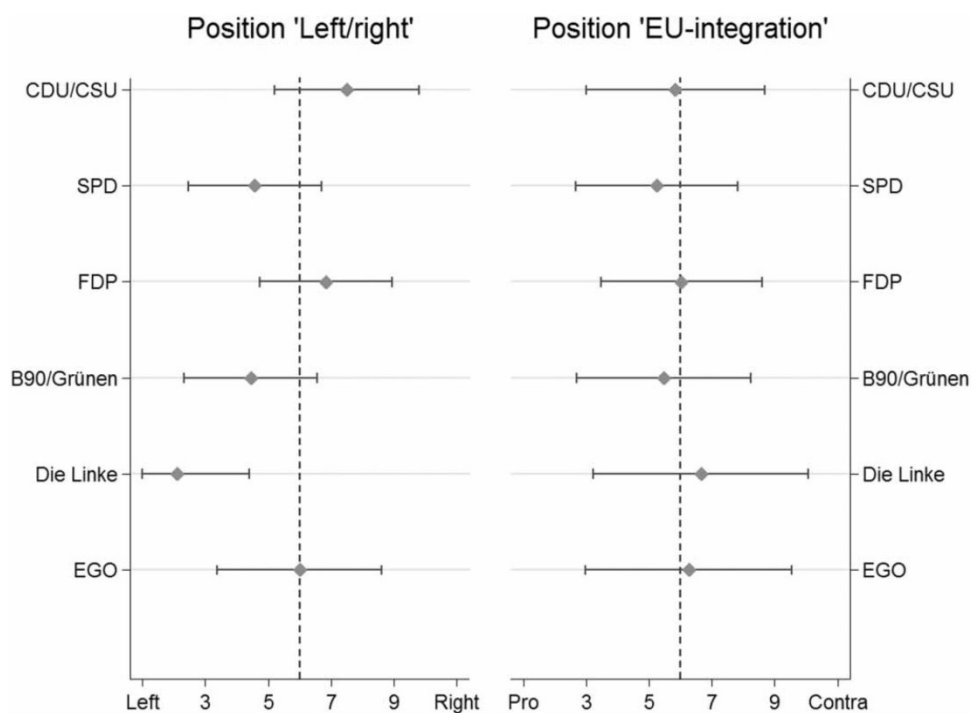
Source: Authors' own calculations based on German Longitudinal Election Study – Langfrist-Online-Tracking, T2, Version: 4.0.0, doi: 10.4232/1.10830.

The missing statistical significance of the positioning on questions of European integration in European elections contradicts Schmitt *et al.*'s<sup>63</sup> finding that vote switchers tend to vote for parties which are closer to their own position in regard to European issues. Again, this irrelevance leads to a confirmation of Hypothesis 2. Furthermore, the significant negative impact on vote probability in the Bundestag elections runs counter to expectations. Incumbency and economic performance show the same effects as in the models presented above. This is also the case for the effect of candidate evaluation. National candidates are important in both elections while European candidates matter only in European elections. Surprisingly, the latter are – in contrast to the Models 2 and 4 – more relevant in the European election than national candidates. The explanatory power and model fit are not as satisfying here as they are for the complete models – the McFadden pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> is .34 for the national and .39 for the European election.<sup>64</sup> The pattern stays the same: strategic voting is not more widespread in national elections than in second-order elections. There is still scarce evidence for the second-order character and the picture is not as clear as earlier studies have suggested. At best, it can be argued that some elements of the vote functions point to second-order elections and other elements point to European elections as first-order elections in their own right.

Finally, we will discuss one of the most interesting findings of this study. In contrast to other studies that identify at least some influence of European issues on party choice in European elections,<sup>65</sup> there is no such effect in Germany in 2009. The irrelevance of European issues is frequently ascribed to the missing attention and interest of citizens. But, as we show, the problem is primarily based on failures on the supply side, meaning that it is hard to discriminate between political parties regarding this issue. Figure 5 pictures the perceived left/right and EU-integration positions of the five major parties as well as the mean position of individuals ('EGO').<sup>66</sup>

As Figure 5 shows, the average position of individuals on both issues is more or less neutral. This is also true for the perceived party positions in terms of EU-integration, but not for party positions in the left/right dimension. The maximum distance between parties is 5.4 (left/right) and 1.0 (EU-integration). Additionally, the standard deviation of each mean is always bigger for EU-integration which can be interpreted as a manifestation of voters' difficulties in rating party positions. Kritzinger and McElroy<sup>67</sup> find similar evidence: in a comparative analysis of all twenty-seven member states, they identify less accuracy if voters are asked to position parties in the context of EU issues than in terms of left/right.

FIGURE 5  
SELF-PLACEMENT AND PERCEIVED PARTY POSITIONS (LEFT/RIGHT AND EU-INTEGRATION)



Note: The x-axis depicts the means of the distributions, whiskers represent one standard deviation. The dashed line depicts the midpoints of the scales.  
Source: Authors' own calculations based on German Longitudinal Election Study – Langfrist-Online-Tracking, T2, Version: 4.0.0, doi: 10.4232/1.10830.

On average, German parties are perceived to have rather similar policy preferences in the context of European integration while, at the same time, these positions are less obvious and clear. A look into objective positions gained from coded manifestos for the 2009 European elections<sup>68</sup> stresses that this is not a mere problem of political communication by German parties and/or a problem of voters' perceptions. In fact, Germany shows the smallest standard deviation of party positions on the EU-integration scale of all twenty-seven member countries. In other words: The supply side's offer is very limited in Germany when it comes to European integration. Hence, voters are forced to use other sources of information or completely different factors to decide who to cast the ballot for. This finding corresponds perfectly with the relative irrelevance of the EU-integration party differentials in the presented models and may help to understand the counter-intuitive results for the national elections as well.

Political parties have to address this issue because the whole idea of direct European elections depends on the relevance of European issues for these elections. It seems to be the most promising way to increase the autonomy of European elections and, thereby, enhance their first-order character. Somehow, German parties are not able to communicate their policy positions or – if there really are no differences between the parties – they are not able to develop their own consistent positions to offer meaningful choices. As soon as questions in regard to European integration become more politicised, there will be more media coverage and, as well, more public interest. The potential membership of Turkey is a perfect example: while only 29 per cent of the respondents voting in both elections are able to assign party positions in regard to EU-integration to all major parties, 94 per cent express a clear opinion on Turkey's membership. Regarding this issue, the preferences of German parties are obviously not identical, the media are very attentive and citizens clearly have developed opinions.

## DISCUSSION

This study addressed the question whether the repeated confirmation of the second-order theory on the macro level can be transferred to and reproduced on the micro level. It was argued that a micro-level perspective is mandatory to avoid the risk of an ecological fallacy. Hence, the implicit assumptions presented in macro-level studies were linked to earlier studies of individual electoral behaviour to enable the formulation of testable hypotheses. The empirical models of decision making were taken from the literature on vote functions and applied to a restricted sample of respondents who voted in the national as well as the European election in Germany in 2009. By choosing this case, differences between national and European election results depending on variation of electoral institutions and/or variation on the supply side were avoided. This enabled focusing on level-specific determinants of individual party choice. Such a strategy and the usage of model specifications based on a modified Michigan model resulted not only in a direct connection to general research on voting behaviour but allowed for a direct comparison of individual rationales as well.

First of all, it is key to point out that the parsimonious model is able to produce a satisfying or even a good model fit. This means that the used vote function is applicable to both political levels and there are no crucial differences between determinants of party choice in national and European elections. The findings reveal that identical



choice criteria are applied by voters – party identification, issues and candidates – in both types of elections. Consequently, *voting with the heart* is not more prominent in elections to the EP. Furthermore, economic voting and incumbency play different roles in the two elections but not as predicted by second-order theory. Both have a significant impact on party choice but only in the national election. This casts more doubt on the previous understanding of European elections as second-order national elections, especially on the concept of *voting with the boot*. Nevertheless, there is also some evidence in favour of the second-order theory. Whereas the general choice criteria are the same on both levels, the specific objects of evaluation differ in accordance to the by-election hypotheses. The evaluation of European candidates has indeed a significant effect on party choice in European elections. Yet, national candidates are still somewhat dominating because they have a significant and stronger effect in both elections. Moreover, the left/right dimension is much more important than the question of EU-integration. In fact, the latter shows not even once a significant effect on vote probabilities in the 2009 European election. If nothing else, missing differences between party positions on European issues are assumed to be partially responsible.

All in all, there are some differences between the vote functions, although, there is no evidence of significantly different patterns on both levels. Apart from different levels of mobilisation clearly classifying European elections as less important, the individual party choice is neither fundamentally different nor does it fit precisely into the proposed pattern of second-order electoral behaviour. Leaving turnout aside, this is some good news for the European democracy and, partially, an easing of the asserted democratic deficit of European elections. According to our findings, voters follow similar rationales of decision making in both elections.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Heiko Giebler holds a MA degree in Social Sciences (Humboldt-University Berlin) and is Research Fellow of the Research Unit 'Democracy and Democratisation' at the WZB Berlin Social Science Centre. He is part of the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) and is a board member of the European Election Studies Association (EES-A). His main research interests include electoral behaviour, political parties, electoral campaigns and quantitative methods.

Aiko Wagner received his PhD at Humboldt-University Berlin. Since 2009, he is working as a Research Fellow of the Research Unit 'Democracy and Democratisation' at the WZB Berlin Social Science Centre. He is part of the German Longitudinal

Election Study (GLES). His main research interests include political attitudes and behaviour, representation, electoral systems, political parties and quantitative methods.

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- 36 The data set is publically available ([www.gesis.org/en/elections/gles/data/](http://www.gesis.org/en/elections/gles/data/)). The representativeness of the survey was ensured by applying population weights. In contrast to other contributions to this special issue, we do not use the multi-level panel data set which is also provided by the GLEs. Using this panel data set to validate the second-order approach solves certain problems, for example, varying temporal distance to the election date but it restricts the set of available predictors necessary for our analysis. Fortunately, results in Giebler, 'Contextualising Turnout and Party Choice: Electoral Behaviour on Different Political Levels', using the panel data set are consistent with our results presented below. He as well finds only rather limited evidence of second-order electoral behaviour in the 2009 European election in Germany.
- 37 For both elections, the survey was run as a pre-election survey (field time: 27 May to 5 June). Therefore, only respondents stating a high probability of participating were considered. This led to turnout rates similar to the real rates and reduced the effects of over-reporting.
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 60 The interpretation of this coefficient is somewhat complicated due to the individualisation process described above. Without a doubt, the interaction of ascribed responsibility and retrospective evaluation of the economic developments has no significant effect on party choice.  
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## APPENDIX

TABLE A1  
 REGRESSION RESULTS ( LOGIT-COEFFICIENTS) FOR MODEL 1 (NATIONAL ELECTION) AND  
 MODEL 2 (EUROPEAN ELECTION)

	Model 1	Model 2
Dependent variable	Vote choice national election	Vote choice European election
Independent variables		
Party identification	<b>2.23***</b>	<b>1.96***</b>
LR party differential	<b>3.38***</b>	<b>3.83***</b>
EU-integration party differential	<b>-1.74*</b>	.24
National candidates	<b>4.55***</b>	<b>3.92***</b>
European candidates	1.47	<b>2.18*</b>
Economy	.64	-.04
Government	<b>-.94***</b>	.01
N (stacked)	1630	1630
LL	-197.9	-186.2
R <sup>2</sup> (McFadden)	.64	.66
Correctly classified	91.8%	92.3%
Sensitivity	79.5%	80.8%
Specificity	94.9%	95.2%

Note: \*\*\*= significant on .1 per cent level; \*\*= significant on 1 per cent level; \*= significant on 5 per cent level.

Source: Authors' own calculations based on German Longitudinal Election Study – Langfrist-Online-Tracking, T2, Version: 4.0.0, doi: 10.4232/1.10830.

TABLE A2  
REGRESSION RESULTS ( LOGIT-COEFFICIENTS) FOR MODEL 3 (NATIONAL ELECTION) AND  
MODEL 4 (EUROPEAN ELECTION)

	Model 3	Model 4
Dependent variable	Vote choice national election	Vote choice European election
Independent variables		
Party identification	<b>1.96***</b>	<b>1.98***</b>
LR party differential	<b>3.01***</b>	<b>3.84***</b>
EU-integration party differential	-.26	.45
National candidates	<b>4.18***</b>	<b>3.78***</b>
European candidates	.46	<b>2.26**</b>
Economy	<b>.73**</b>	-.03
Government	<b>-.67***</b>	.05
N (stacked)	2795	1645
LL	-387.0	-189.6
R <sup>2</sup> (McFadden)	.57	.66
Correctly classified	90.1%	92.2%
Sensitivity	75.1%	80.6%
Specificity	93.8%	95.1%

*Note:*\*\*\*= significant on .1 per cent level; \*\*= significant on 1 per cent level; \*= significant on 5 per cent level.

*Source:* Authors' own calculations based on German Longitudinal Election Study – Langfrist-Online-Tracking, T2, Version: 4.0.0, doi: 10.4232/1.10830.

TABLE A 3  
REGRESSION RESULTS (LOGIT-COEFFICIENTS) FOR MODEL 5 (NATIONAL ELECTION) AND  
MODEL 6 (EUROPEAN ELECTION)

	Model 5	Model 6
Dependent variable	Vote choice national election	Vote choice European election
Independent variables		
Party identification	<b>.94*</b>	<b>.67*</b>
LR party differential	<b>2.31*</b>	<b>3.54***</b>
EU-integration party differential	<b>-2.20*</b>	-.54
National candidates	<b>3.41***</b>	<b>2.15*</b>
European candidates	1.50	<b>4.81**</b>
Economy	<b>1.04*</b>	-.32
Government	<b>-1.13**</b>	<b>.76*</b>
N (stacked)	435	420
LL	-93.6	-87.0
R <sup>2</sup> (McFadden)	.34	.39
Correctly classified	82.1%	84.8%
Sensitivity	55.3%	61.9%
Specificity	88.8%	90.5%

*Note:* \*\*\*= significant on .1 per cent level; \*\*= significant on 1 per cent level; \*= significant on 5 per cent level.

*Source:* Authors' own calculations based on German Longitudinal Election Study – Langfrist-Online-Tracking, T2, Version: 4.0.0, doi: 10.4232/1.10830.