

Second-Order Elections and European Parliament Elections: An Empirical Test with British Data

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Abstract

Elections to the European Parliament (EP) have often been regarded as second-order elections, because they do not involve the power and formation of a national government. According to the second-order election thesis, people believe that there is less at stake in second-order elections, so they are less likely to turn out to vote in these elections. While various macro-level evidence in EP elections has been found to support the above hypotheses, micro-level evidence has not yielded a conclusive result. In particular, there is little evidence to support the hypothesis that European citizens believe there is less at stake in EP elections.

This paper attempts to re-examine the micro-foundation of the second-order election thesis. Using survey data from *British Election Panel Study*, the author finds that British people who are not interested in European politics were less likely to vote in the 1994 EP election. However, lacking political interest in Europe is not equivalent to believing that EP elections are not important. It can be attributed to a lack of information, alternatives or something which has nothing to do with voters' evaluation of the importance of EP elections. Faced this ambiguous evidence, the author presents an alternative micro-level hypothesis: namely, party mobilization hypothesis. Initial evidence from the United Kingdom is provided to support this hypothesis.

Key Words: second-order election, European Parliament, party-mobilization hypothesis, ticket-splitting, tactical voting