

Measuring Candidate Selection Mechanisms in European Elections: Comparing Formal Party Rules to Candidate Survey Responses

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Abstract

Students of party organization often rely on politicians' perceptions when measuring internal party institutions and organizational characteristics. We compare a commonly used survey measure of political parties' European Parliament candidate selection mechanisms to measures that the authors coded directly from parties' selection rules. We find substantial disconnect between formal institutions and survey respondent perceptions of selection mechanisms, raising questions about measure accuracy and equivalency. While this divergence may be driven either by distinctions between de jure and de facto selection procedures or by respondent error, we find the differences between the two measures are unsystematic. Our findings suggest authors studying party characteristics must decide whether their research question calls for survey or formal institutional measures.

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A party must make nominations if it is to be regarded as a party at all. By observing the party process at this point one may hope to discover the locus of power within the party, for he who has the power to make the nomination owns the party.

— *E.E. Schattschneider (1942, pp. 100)*

Party organizations play a crucial role in the representational relationship between voters and governments. Candidate selection mechanisms modulate the extent to which parties' leaderships control who represents the party in government. In turn, as party leaders extend their power over nominations, they more aggressively shape the representational opportunities available to the electorate. As Pesonen (1968, 348) maintains “the nomination stage eliminates 99.96 percent of all eligible people. The voters choose only 0.04 percent.”¹ While party theorists argue that nomination rules have important implications for electoral and legislative behavior (see e.g. Schattschneider 1942, Ranney 1981, Matthews 1984, Rahat & Hazan 2001, Siavelis 2002, Kernell 2008, Shomer 2009, Hazan & Rahat 2010), we lack cross-nationally comparable party-level measures of candidate selection mechanisms. Instead, authors often use elite surveys to measure party institutions.

We examine whether expert codings of party statutes produce measures of candidate selection mechanisms that align with those produced by politicians responding to surveys. We leverage an unusual opportunity to assess the interchangeability of expert-coded institutional measures and survey-based perceptions. First, we generate a new measure of centralization of candidate selection in European Parliament (EP) elections, coded from careful case studies of party institutions conducted by the research arm of the EP. We then compare our measures to extant, and frequently used, candidate-survey-based measures of selection centralization in EP elections. Despite responding to almost identical prompts, experts and politicians produce inconsistent measures. Our results, therefore, highlight serious conceptualization and measurement issues inherent in interchangeably using expert coding and elite surveys to analyze party institutions.

A large literature explores questions related to expert coding and surveys in political science. Most scholars find that expert surveys tend to do a reasonable job assessing politi-

¹In Gallagher (1988).

cal characteristics (Budge 2000, Steenbergen & Marks 2007, Clinton & Lewis 2008, Hooghe, Bakker, Brigevid, de Vries, Edwards, Marks, Rovny & Steenbergen 2010). Indeed, a growing literature has begun to question the necessity of using expert surveys at all, and instead suggests using the “wisdom of the crowds,” leveraging large numbers of responses from non-experts to produce valid measures of complex political concepts (Maestas, Buttice & Stone 2014, Benoit, Conway, Lauderdale, Laver & Mikhaylov 2016, Coppedge, Glynn, Lindberg, Pemstein & Seim 2015). The underlying question explored by these papers, however, is subtly different than ours. They ask whether surveys of laymen or experts can produce valid measures, while we are interested in comparing expert assessments to practitioner survey responses. Thus, while both expert survey and crowd-sourced approaches ask external assessors to evaluate political phenomena based on some conceptual framework—in essence, they ask people to act as coders—we compare such coding to practitioner self-assessment. Because these two tasks—coding and self-assessment—are potentially quite different, we ask whether surveys of political actors and expert coding may be measuring different constructs, even in the relatively concrete realm of candidate selection rules. We suggest that the incoherence that we find between actor understanding and expert coder interpretation probably extends to other measures of party characteristics because candidate selection is not atypical in its difficulty of measurement and conceptualization.

As with any institution, formal and de facto candidate selection mechanisms may differ. The divergence found in our analysis potentially reflects the differences between a purely formal understanding of political institutions and behavioral experience—what Greif (2006, 7) calls the difference between “institutions-as-rules” vs. “behavioral prescriptions.” While expert codings may capture either de jure or de facto institutions, the measure that we introduce here explicitly focuses on party statutes, and thus prioritizes rules over norms. On the other hand, candidate surveys ask politicians to report on their personal experiences; measures based on practitioner self-report will tend to focus on de facto institutions. We find that candidates report experiencing a more decentralized selection process than party

statues describe, consistent with this interpretation. This work therefore contributes to a much larger debate about how to measure political institutions (see e.g. Glaeser, La Porta, Lopez-de Silanes & Shleifer 2004, Elkins, Ginsburg & Melton 2009, Voigt 2013).

Second, we advance the possibility that survey observations of actors may not accurately measure even de facto party rules, but instead may be understood as imperfect perceptions of reality. We show that candidates from the same parties often disagree about selection processes; while this incoherence may reflect simple intra-party variation in selection it may also stem from misunderstanding—either of the selection process, or of the concepts that researchers are attempting to elicit—by respondents. In general, politicians may not conceptualize the selection process consistently, just as citizens’ understandings of other political institutions, like democracy, differ from those of both one another, and researchers (see e.g. Dalton, Shin & Jou 2007, Canache 2012).

1 Measuring Centralization of Selection

Much of the work on candidate selection takes the form of country-level cases studies (see e.g. Norris 1997) and cross-national datasets of party organizational characteristics, and nomination procedures, are rare. Parties are numerous and often lack transparency, or even good internal record-keeping, and collecting detailed information about party organizations across countries, even for a cross-section of time, is onerous. While some researchers have recently undertaken such efforts for specific projects (Kernell 2008, Shomer 2009, Shomer 2014, Aldrich 2015), the only large-scale, publicly available cross-national database of party organization covers Western democracies for the period 1960–1990 (Katz & Mair 1992). To our knowledge, there is no contemporary database of party rules and selection procedures yet available to the public. A lack of cross-national, over-time, institutional coding is typical for the measurement of party level characteristics more broadly.

1.1 Coding Formal Party Rules

More recently, the Political Party Database Project (PPDB) has collected an archive of party statutes and begun to collect data on party organizations in at least 18 democracies (Scarrow & Webb 2013).² While these data are not yet public, the project has developed a conceptual framework for understanding party organizations based on three broad areas—structures, resources, and linkages—each of which is further sub-divided into a series of dimensions, and then specific questions.

We focus on a characteristic of parties that is especially salient theoretically: centralization of candidate selection. We used the PPDB framework to guide the development of the coding rules that we used to assess the centralization of candidate selection across European parties. We base our coding on a comprehensive document on parties' candidate selection rules for European Elections, commissioned by the EU Parliament Directorate for Internal Policies (Policy Department C: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs 2009). The document provides a detailed description of the formal candidate selection rules that each party used when competing in the 2009 election. We used the Directorate's report to complete the PPDB's legislative elections questionnaire for most of the parties that competed in the 2009 EP elections.³⁴ We used the EP directorate's report to answer an open-ended question derived from the PPDB, and then generated a number of concrete variables from our open-ended responses, both to make our data amenable to statistical analysis, and to produce data that correspond to extant survey-based measures of candidate selection mechanisms in EP elections. To maximize correspondence to existing measures of EP selection, we grouped variables to describe the candidate selection roles of national party officials, regional/local party officials, individual party members, non-party members, and interest groups, diverging somewhat from the PPDB grouping. Specifically, we coded whether each group had one or

²The scope of the project has expanded over time.

³We would like to thank Susan Scarrow for sharing the PPDB's questionnaire for party rules related to legislative elections (Module B) with us.

⁴The report covers the selection details of 142 national parties in 25 EU countries, missing only reports for Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Malta.

more types of institutional control over candidate selection for the 2009 EP elections: pre-selection of candidates considered, final selection of candidates, or veto power over candidate nominations. We also coded an indicator for whether a group had any formal involvement in selection, taking a value of 1 if that group had one or more of pre-selection, veto, or final selection power over candidates.

1.2 Survey-Based Measures

While the theoretical work on selection mechanisms focuses largely on formal institutions—as do Katz & Mair (1992) and Scarrow & Webb (2013)—one way to overcome the massive hurdles to data collection in this domain is to rely on surveys of candidates, elected politicians, or party leaders who have personal experience with their parties’ selection processes. This approach has been especially popular for measuring party selection procedures for EP elections, which include candidates from hundreds of candidates across dozens of countries (see e.g. van der Kolk, Schmitt, Scholz & Thomassen 1997, Norris & Franklin 1997, Raunio 2000, Faas 2003, Hix 2004, Farrell, Hix, Johnson & Scully 2006). While not cheap, survey-based measures represent a convenient alternative to finding, obtaining, and coding party statutes, and have the potential advantage of capturing *de facto*, rather than *de jure*, nomination procedures. Furthermore, in some domains, surveys of politicians have proved accurate (Maestas et al. 2014). Nonetheless, these measures may suffer from many of the common problems of elite surveys (e.g. non-response bias) and, because theory tends to focus on *de jure* institutions, it is important to understand the extent to which they capture this concept.

We therefore compare our statute-based measures to variables collected through candidate surveys. Following the model of earlier EP candidate studies, the Collaborative Project on Providing an Infrastructure for Research on Electoral Democracy in the European Union (PIREDEU) conducted surveys around the 2009 EP election which asked candidates, among other things, several questions about selection. First, we use two questions from the survey—“On which level were you nominated as an official candidate for the EP election?” and “On

this level, who officially nominated you to run in the European Parliament elections?”— which allow us to generate a variable directly comparable to our expert coding from examining rules. The first questions admits three levels: (a) national, (b) regional, and (c) local. The second identifies five actors: (1) party executive board, (2) appointed party members, (3) elected party members (delegates), (4) all party members, and (5) voters. Combining responses to these variables, we generate a set of mutually exclusive response categories: (a; 1, 2, 3) national party officials, (b; 1, 2, 3) regional party officials, (c; 1, 2, 3) local party officials, and (a, b, c; 4) individual party members.⁵

The survey also asked respondents: “In your party, how important are the following groups in the selection of candidates for the European Parliament?”⁶ Respondents provided ordinal answers ranging from (1) “Not at all important” to (5) “very important” (Giebler, Haus & Wessels 2010). To directly compare party statutes to this broad ordinal survey question, we created an author-coded variable using the same subjective prompt as the PIREDEU survey, generated by examining the institutional rules in the EP document. Using our previously described dummy codings and a close reading of the text on the institutional process, we rendered a subjective judgment analogous to that required of survey respondents, rating the importance of each actor in the selection process from 1–5. We compared each actor’s importance in each aspect of candidate selection to that of other selectors. The EP document rarely provided direct information on veto power of actors at different levels, reflecting either the rarity of that power or the EP researchers’ increased attention to other, more important powers. As a result, when we coded the 1–5 variable, we focused on preselection and final selection of candidates, generally coding actors as the most powerful when they could participate both in preselection and final selection. Also, when actors only participate in one step of the selection process, we weighted final selection as more powerful than only

⁵Only 28 respondents indicated that voters selected them and only four such respondents hail from parties included in the EP case studies. We dropped these respondents from the analysis.

⁶For this variable, the groups are: national party officials, regional/local party officials (combined), individual party members, non-party members, and interest groups. We again drop non-party members from what follows.

preselection.

2 Comparing Formal Institutions and Survey Responses

To what extent do formal party rules and candidates' perceptions tell the same story about the leverage that different groups—national leaderships, local party organizations, party members, and external actors—have over candidate nomination? This question matters, especially for students of the EP, because researchers have long relied on candidate surveys to understand how party nomination processes affect outcomes ranging from legislative behavior (Hix 2004) to the types of candidates that hold European office (Pemstein, Meserve & Bernhard 2015). Moreover, survey responses may diverge from party statutes for a variety of reasons. Candidates are rarely versed in theories of party organization and may conceptualize the role of a given selectorate differently from political scientists. Survey respondents may focus on personal experiences to the exclusion of the bigger picture. For example, a candidate who relied on a mentor in the local party organization as her career developed, might consider that person integral to her nomination, even if the national leadership had total power over the selection process.⁷ Candidates may also have trouble situating their own experiences within a cross-party, and cross-national, context and variation in how individuals respond to Likert scales threatens the cross-party comparability of responses (King & Wand 2007).

The PIREDEU survey exhibits substantial within-party variation. To summarize this variation, we first translated the PIREDEU questions about level of selection and selector identity into a nominal variable with four selectorate categories: national party officials, regional party officials, local party officials or individual party members. Tellingly, 359 out of 1,155 non-missing survey respondents provided responses that differed from their party's modal response. This pattern is consistent across parties. On average, about 26% of a party's survey respondents disagree with the party mode. This level of incoherence is surprising given

⁷And that candidate would not be wrong, exactly, she would just be measuring a concept quite different from that envisioned by theorists of party organization.

that selection is thought to be central to rational candidate calculations.

Similarly, respondents vary considerably when subjectively assessing groups' importance for candidates selection. The average within-party standard deviation for the 5-point response to the national-level importance question is 0.91 for parties with more than one response, and the maximum within-party standard deviation for that question is 2.83.⁸ Respondents therefore exhibit substantial disagreement, even when evaluating party institutions holistically. Moreover, candidate surveys exhibit high non-response rates (402 survey respondents out of 1,576 did not answer the subjective selection question), raising the specter of systematic bias.

[Table 1 about here.]

Furthermore, elite and expert-based measures appear to capture different concepts. Table 1 compares the count of observations where the level of selector identified by the survey respondent agrees with the final selector coded using institutional rules.⁹ There is massive divergence, with survey responses disagreeing (695) more than they agree (479) with our party statute-based measure. As we will discuss later, most of this disagreement stems from survey respondents perceiving the selection process as more decentralized than institutional rules dictate, since institutional rules say that national party officials have final selection power around 72% of the time.

[Table 2 about here.]

We now turn to our other survey measure of centralization, a set of thermometers— with scores ranging from 1–5—indicating the extent to which actors at different levels exert influence over candidate nominations. Again, survey responses depart significantly from

⁸Regional/local, individual member, and interest group importance questions have similarly high within-party standard deviations.

⁹Note that creating the same table using a slightly different expert coded variable, a dummy for any selection power (final, veto, preselection), generates slightly higher levels of agreement (633 agree vs. 541 disagree) at the cost of reducing the validity of the comparison because using a dummy for any selection power creates non-mutually exclusive categories (e.g. multiple selectors coded as a 1 for the same party).

an equivalent set of thermometers that the authors coded directly from the EP’s report. Table 2 displays bivariate correlations between median candidate survey responses about the importance of a given group on their selection for European Parliament elections¹⁰ and the analogous measure generated by the authors examining institutional rules directly in the 2009 European Parliament elections for 121 European parties. Simply put, the correlation is generally positive but is much lower than might be expected, running from a high correlation of 0.37 between survey and expert codings of the importance of national officials to a low of -0.10 (essentially no correlation) for the importance of interest groups. This lack of correlation is troubling, especially because the literature has tended to use survey and expert-coded measures of centralization interchangeably.

[Figure 1 about here.]

[Figure 2 about here.]

[Figure 3 about here.]

Figures 1-3 compare the distributions of our ordinal centralization measure to partisans’ median responses for what are, in practice, the most often theorized about and empirically used institutional measures of party selection: national, regional/local, and party member influence on the selection process.¹¹ Several major patterns stand out. Turning to figure 1, based on a direct reading of relevant party institutional features, national parties often possess the predominant power in selecting candidates in our comparable sample. They have the power to dictate who will be on the list, generally through final candidate selection

¹⁰We use the median to summarize the survey response for party-level comparisons on the centralization measure, following Lindstädt, Proksch & Slapin (2016), who argue that medians generally outperform means when aggregating ordinal ratings. We return to this issue in section 3.

¹¹Note that table party frequencies are different between coded and survey data because the EP produced document did not contain some parties and the survey also did not receive responses from a number of parties. The source document for the expert codings does not contain a number of small parties, presumably because the EP researchers had a difficult time finding their rules. Similarly, for some parties the PIREDEU survey received no respondents, again generally from small parties, who are omitted from our histogram. While we do not see it as a significant drawback, our results must, necessarily, be seen as being based on similarities and differences between survey and expert codings of a sample skewed toward larger parties.

(108 parties), causing us to code them as a “very” important group 87% of the time. While the survey also shows that the national level is often important, survey respondents are more likely to answer that their central parties are simply moderately important to their selection, despite the formal rules that give their national parties final say over nomination. Second, survey respondents often see their local officials and individual party members as more important than formal party rules indicate. Coded and survey members suggest, modally, that regional and local officials are important and moderately important to their nomination, respectively, but party rules provide little or no formal role for regional and local actors; while relatively few survey respondents indicated that such actors were “not important,” this is the second most common coding in our rule-based data. The same pattern holds true for individual party members, where only a minority of parties grant the rank and file institutional selection powers. By contrast, surveyed members tend to see individual party members as moderately important in their selection, conflicting substantially with our institution-based assessments. The emphasis on local selectorates is also evident in the dummy-coded measures.

On the whole, it is safe to say that institutional coding and survey based perceptions differ substantially.¹² We argue that our dataset, drawn from an in-depth study by EP researchers, represents a purely de jure understanding of institutions. We see two possible explanations for the difference between our data and the survey results: the survey could tap either ignorance or a contextualized understanding of survey questions. Each of these explanations suggests different interpretations of survey-based measures of institutional re-

¹²Note that response rates tend to be an issue, as Whitaker, Hix & Zapryanova (2017) discuss at length, in the context of a series of similar surveys conducted only on MEPs rather than candidates. Response rates in these data vary greatly, particularly by country, from a relative low of 5-20% in countries like Italy or France to consistently high 20-40% in Germany (Giebler et al. 2010, 228-239). A more important question for our study is whether these response rates bias our results. On one hand, relatively low response rates may bias against our findings of large differences between survey responses and expert codes because particularly ignorant candidates may be those least likely to respond to the survey. On the other hand, it is possible that it is precisely those low effort, ignorant candidates with little else to do that respond to the survey, creating the appearance of subjective understanding of institutions and/or ignorance. Ultimately, our regression results in the Appendix do not indicate significant differences in level of disagreement between countries with different numbers of respondents, providing some evidence that non-response is not driving cross-measure differences in measures.

relationships, meaning that they measure different understandings of institutions than the de jure dataset we created.

First, the differences could be caused by interpreting the survey data as simply measuring candidate (mis)perceptions. Widespread ignorance about party institutions, the simplest explanation, may also be the most disturbing from the perspective of effectively using candidate survey data to measure complex features of political parties to capture rational candidate behavior. The minimal correlation between survey responses and formal party candidate selection mechanisms, using broadly accepted definitions and coding frames, could be the result of an unclear understanding of these procedures by the candidates themselves, who instead could rely on other vague cues or cognitive shortcuts. Candidates may not have a good sense of which groups within the party they are beholden to for the quality of their nominations, or they may not have a good feel for how their party's mechanisms rank relative to other parties, especially parties in other countries. The most salient feature of the data supporting this interpretation of the disagreements between our coding and the survey is the large within-party disagreement about the primary selectorate: 26% of respondents disagree with their party modes.

The variance in the survey responses implies that candidates do not widely share beliefs about their own party's candidate selection mechanisms. Thus, rather than accurately tapping the de facto state of affairs, survey response may capture idiosyncratic information based on personal—rather than party—context. In other words, candidate perceptions may diverge both from institutional rules and de facto norms. For example, candidates may be likely to credit actors with whom they are well acquainted with facilitating their nominations, even when other actors made decisions outside of the candidates' view. In general, an availability heuristic may cloud candidate perceptions of the roles of different selectors.

If true, the perceptions explanation may hold profound implications for both scholarly work and, moreover, for rational models of subtle institutional distinctions. Clearly, if scholars are surveying candidates about their institutions instead of coding those rules themselves,

and respondents are not especially accurate or reliable, scholars need to think twice about using such measures. The error created by using uncertain respondents could potentially influence results based on the measures, even if the results are not biased systematically, something we explore in section 3. Thinking more theoretically about possible implications of our results, if candidates do not keep careful track of the selectorate in the party, perhaps the most important factor in their political future, it could call into question some of the models used by political scientists to predict politician behavior. Many arguments assume politicians intensively monitor and respond to the incentives created by their institutional environment. But ignorant candidates, however rational, lack the information to follow standard models of career maximizing behavior.

While ignorance may seem like the a straightforward explanation of our results, politicians' responses might reflect context and de facto reality. Consider the subjective question asked by the survey to measure candidate selection mechanisms, "In your party, how important are the following groups in the selection of candidates for the European Parliament?" The question may be eliciting responses incorporating not just formal rules but also informal norms and inter-party relationships. Candidates could correctly perceive other individuals who are not institutionally imbued with selection powers as holding significant power in their reelection.

Note that this contextual argument is consistent with respondents' overall underreporting (relative to formal coding of institutions) of the importance of the national level in their nomination relative to regional/local in figures 1 and 2. Most parties give the national level primary (usually final selection) or at least major powers over nomination (e.g. veto). Candidates may perceive that national parties rarely exercise that power—perhaps their regional and local party elites pass names along to national elites and are almost never overridden. Indeed, historically, local organizations were the primary arbiters of nomination, and while the balance of power has changed as parties have evolved, especially in terms of

formal rules, they surely retain substantial power (Katz 2001).¹³ This interpretation does not suggest that politicians irrationally ignore their own interests, or lack the information to make career-maximizing decisions. Yet, while candidate surveys might measure the de facto party selectorate, they provide little leverage over questions about formal institutions. And, because survey measures have largely been researchers' only option, there has been little incentive to carefully distinguish between these two conceptualizations of nomination.

Ultimately, the contextual explanation comes up short in explaining the data. First, while the high intra-party variance might reflect a world where party selection is truly idiosyncratic, such an argument would be inconsistent with what we think we know about party selection in Europe. While many parties have democratized their candidate selection rules over time (Hopkin 2001, Laffin, Shaw & Taylor 2007, Langston 2006), this formal relaxation of centralized—or local organization—party power has been modest (Bille 2001). Similarly, while our findings indicate that candidates tend to believe that individual party members are stronger than an institutional analysis indicates, Katz (2001) argues that party leaders often actually strengthen their de facto power when formally broadening the selectorate.

Second, consider that the objective questions asked of respondents: “Were you nominated as an official candidate for the EP election on the _____ level?” and “Who officially nominated you to run for the EP elections?” It directly asks candidates whom their de jure selectorates were. The disagreement between expert coded and survey responses to these objective questions suggests that an informal understanding of the question cannot explain all of the observed differences, which are more consistent with an ignorance explanation.

Our findings highlight that studies of candidate selection should be careful to distinguish between de jure rules, personal perceptions, and de facto powers when investigating causal relationships between selection rules and various outcomes. This is a key issue both of theory and measurement. One should not, for example, conclude that centralized nomination

¹³Our focus on European elections introduces another interesting wrinkle here. While parties may have put leadership-centric selection rules in place for these newer elections (Katz 2001), long established norms from national party competition may still hold sway.

mechanisms—either formal or de facto—encourage the selection of certain forms of candidates simply because those types of candidates report that they were selected by central party organs more often than others.

3 Explaining Expert and Practitioner Disagreement

The descriptive results show a lack of correlation between expert-coded and survey measures. But do survey responses exhibit consistent biases when compared to expert codes? The previous section suggests that survey measures may be relatively uncorrelated with actual institutional differences, perhaps suggesting stochastic error, but it is also possible that accuracy and reliability could vary depending on which party’s candidates we observe. To explore this possibility, we tested bias by regressing the observed differences between coded and survey data—the absolute value of coded importance minus the median of survey response importance for a given party—on plausible party level explanatory variables. In an exploratory analysis, we tested whether parties’ right-left and pro-anti European positions, national (post-communist) context, size, and number of survey respondents predict inconsistencies between expert coding and survey responses.¹⁴

Summarizing the findings, none of the variables appeared to be related to the difference between institutional codings and survey perceptions. Party members are not, therefore, consistently biased in their assessment of their institutions with respect to plausible background variables. On one hand, these regressions might put applied users of surveys and expert codings of party characteristics at ease—their measures of institutions may be biased but they are not more or less biased as a function of party characteristics, which generally drive applied regressions of this nature and therefore could be correlated with results. On the other hand, if candidates exhibit biases that separate survey from expert institutional measures, even consistently across parties, these errors could still be obscuring systematic relationships between selection mechanisms and other variables.

¹⁴The supplemental appendix provides full results.

4 Conclusion

We generated a new measure of centralization of candidate selection in EP elections for the purposes of comparing it to existing, candidate-survey-based data, finding little coherence between survey responses and our statute-based measure. Further examination of this divergence showed that party characteristics do not predict the differences between the two measures.

Our findings suggest several conclusions. Most importantly, direct coding of institutions and surveys asking identical questions do *not* capture the same information, suggesting they should not be used interchangeably. This result represents a significant conceptual challenge for applied work on party characteristics—does the bulk of extant research address perceptions of party rules or institutional relationships within parties? In particular, it is important to try to untangle respondent error from the potential that these data measure two different things: de jure and de facto selection mechanisms. Survey measures appear to capture a more local understanding of candidate selection. Survey respondents often emphasize the importance of local elites or membership at large, even when their institutional selection rules say their national party has final selection power. This may reflect the distinction between de facto mechanisms and formal rules. But the data are more consistent with the possibility that respondents are unduly swayed by idiosyncratic experience. Indeed, answers to the objective questions on the PIREDEU survey show that many respondents lack knowledge about their party’s formal selection mechanisms. This calls into question theories that link selection mechanisms to purposeful behavior by candidates. Thus, while candidate surveys may provide insight into what motivates particular candidates, researchers should avoid using such surveys to measure party institutions.

We have little reason, based on what we have seen here, to expect candidate surveys to provide information about formal institutions that correspond to resource-intensive expert coding of party statutes. Of course, neither process—surveying candidate nor expert-coding statutes—is likely to accurately capture aggregate de facto candidate selection mechanisms,

something that is perhaps impossible without significant fieldwork.

Becoming more specific, there are several prominent EU literatures potentially affected by differences in selector perceptions. The most obvious is the large literature on legislative responsibility and whipping in the European Parliament (Hix 2002, Hix 2004, Hix, Noury & Roland 2007) and elsewhere (Carey 2009). If legislators have varying perceptions of the identity of their selectorate, differing from formal institutions, making claims about the meaning of their defections may become difficult. Beyond whipping, EU voting literatures as diverse as policy importance (Klüver & Spoon 2013), career path (Meserve, Pemstein & Bernhard 2009), or institutional learning in new EU members (Lindstädt, Slapin & Vander Wielen 2012) all posit that voting defection from national parties or EU groups indicates loyalty differences between those groups. Our results, however, could instead suggest voting defections reflect intraparty disagreements between selectors or, alternatively, the manifestation of idiosyncratic MEP ignorance.

Overall, we caution researchers to carefully distinguish between *de facto* and *de jure* institutions when studying party rules. Surveys like PIREDEU remain useful, provided that researchers posit hypotheses that tap *de facto* perceptions or personal experience with institutions rather than *de jure* rules—a common behavioral goal if we want to explore how individuals form attitudes or inform decisionmaking. Yet substantial non-response, and the large degree of disagreement within parties call into question whether candidate surveys effectively measure even *de facto* mechanisms. This is an outstanding question that requires additional research. By contrast, institutional codings measure the rules but may not capture either reality or candidate perceptions. It is therefore incumbent on researchers to make sure that their theoretical framework matches the types of data that they use.

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Table 1: Congruence Between Survey and Coded Measures: Dummies

Survey Selector	Agree w/Expert Code	Disagree w/Expert Code
National Party Officials	321	296
Regional Officials	65	226
Local Officials	7	54
Individual Party Members	86	119

Survey identified selector plotted against expert code of final selector.

Table 2: Subjective 1–5 Assessment Correlations Between Survey and Coded Measures

Group	Correlation
National Officials	0.37
Regional/Local Officials	0.12
Individual Party Members	0.32
Interest Groups	-0.10
N	121

Figure 1: Distribution of Coded vs. Survey National Official Selection Power

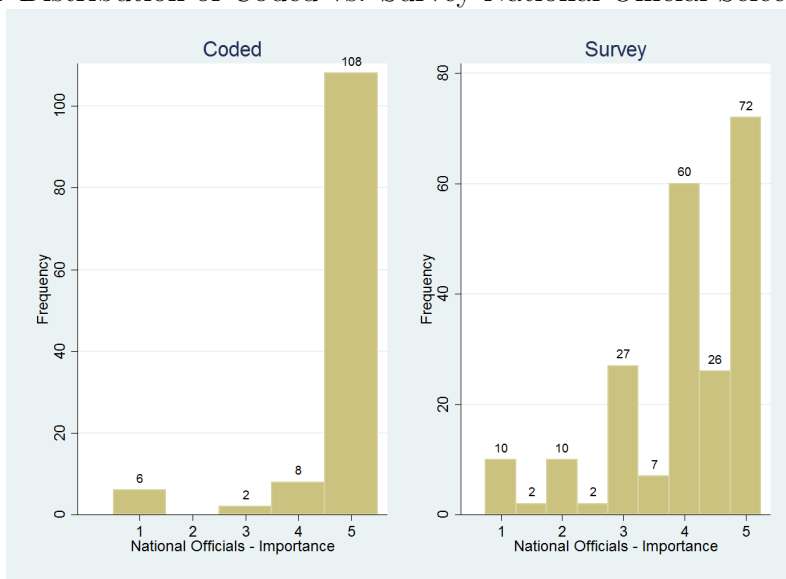


Figure 2: Distribution of Coded vs. Survey Regional/Local Official Selection Power

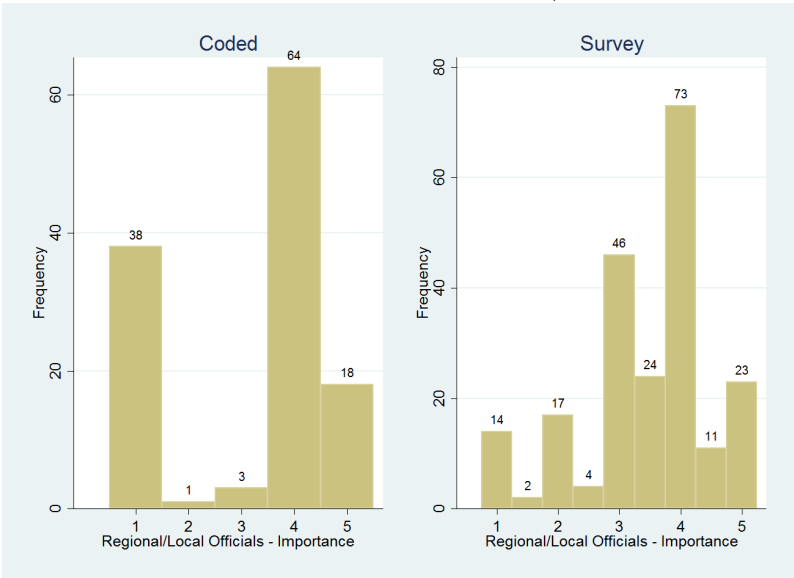


Figure 3: Distribution of Coded vs. Survey Individual Party Member Selection Power

