



Do the options offered help determine the answers given?

The impact of response option effects on answers to party closeness questions in two post-European Election Surveys, 2004¹

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Abstract:

There has been much scholarly debate over the measurement of party identification and the degree to which closeness to parties is an enduring stable attitude. This research investigates an important puzzle where two post-European election surveys undertaken during June 2004 yield significantly different estimates of citizen closeness to political parties. The key difference between both survey projects was the implementation of middle response options. This question format change did not have uniform effects. In these two countries there were relatively few differences in estimates of party closeness. However, in a majority of countries this methodological change had significant effects. In eleven EU member states estimates of party closeness increased: while in nine others it declined. Such evidence suggests that European citizens' closeness to parties is not fixed, and the dynamics of party identification have an important contextual component. Building on this insight we argue in this paper that the differences in estimates of party closeness observed tells us important things about the nature of party identification in contemporary Europe.

¹ The research is based on the European Election Survey 2004 survey (EES04) and Flash Eurobarometer 162. The latter dataset was provided by the Sociological Data Archive, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. Special thanks to Yana Leontiyeva and Jindrich Krejci. In undertaking this research both authors gratefully acknowledge funding from the "Participation, Democracy and Citizenship in the Czech Republic" project financed by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic (Grant No. 403/04/1007, 2004–2006) and "Legitimacy of Political System and Inequalities" (Grant No. 403/06/1421, 2006–2008).

Introduction

The year 2004 was a very important year within the history of the EU for two reasons. First, May 1st saw the largest single enlargement of the European integration project. Second, the European Parliament elections of June 10-13 were the first ever Europe-wide elections that involved citizens from twenty-five states voting for representatives in a single parliamentary chamber. Following these unique elections there were two post-election surveys, Flash Eurobarometer 162 (FLEB 162) and the European Election Study (EES 04), undertaken in almost all EU member states. While the main focus of these two cross-national research projects were attitudes toward the integration project, electoral participation and vote choice – both surveys also inquired about citizens' perceived closeness to political parties.

The different goals and purposes of these two large post-election surveys resulted in a very similar party closeness question being implemented. The only difference arising between the survey projects was the number response options implemented – EES 04 offered four choices (very close, fairly close, sympathiser, not close) while FLEB 162 presented three (very close, somewhat close, not close). It is important to stress from the outset that both EES 04 and FLEB 162 were identical in undertaking representative national samples and doing their research during the same time period (the last two weeks of June 2004).

Table 1. Comparison of estimates for the party closeness item implemented in Flash Eurobarometer 162 and the European Election Study surveys following the EP elections of June 2004 (per cent)

Country	ESS 2004 estimates				Flash FLEB 162 estimates				Diff. EB162 – ESS04		
	Very close	Fairly close / sympathiser	Close to party	N	Very close	Somewhat close	Close to party	N	Close to party	Middle categories	Not close at all
Austria	17	36	47	1000	25	36	38	986	8	1	-9
Britain	6	31	63	1499	11	27	62	1002	4	-3	-1
Cyprus	30	41	29	500	25	36	38	966	-4	-5	9
Czech Republic	11	51	38	889	14	23	63	950	3	-28	25
Denmark	6	46	48	1317	9	27	63	970	3	-19	15
Estonia	2	38	61	1588	17	31	52	949	15	-7	-9
Finland	8	46	46	900	16	41	44	951	7	-5	-2
France	6	43	51	1394	8	47	45	958	1	4	-5
Germany	7	41	52	629	18	44	38	965	12	2	-14
Greece	23	40	36	500	32	39	29	1001	9	-2	-7
Hungary	7	29	64	1200	18	43	39	950	12	14	-26
Ireland	7	53	41	1154	10	25	65	968	3	-27	24
Italy	12	57	32	1553	17	45	38	897	5	-12	6
Latvia	2	37	62	1000	3	11	86	958	1	-25	24
Luxembourg	14	54	32	1336	16	35	49	980	2	-19	17
Netherlands	5	76	19	1586	17	55	28	1000	13	-21	8
Poland	4	44	52	1540	13	19	68	919	9	-25	16
Portugal	6	60	35	959	19	35	46	1000	13	-24	11
Slovakia	5	44	50	1000	20	31	49	987	14	-13	-1
Slovenia	5	29	66	1064	10	22	68	963	5	-7	2
Spain	5	58	37	1001	19	39	42	949	15	-19	4
Sweden	15	67	19	1202	11	56	34	942	-4	-11	15

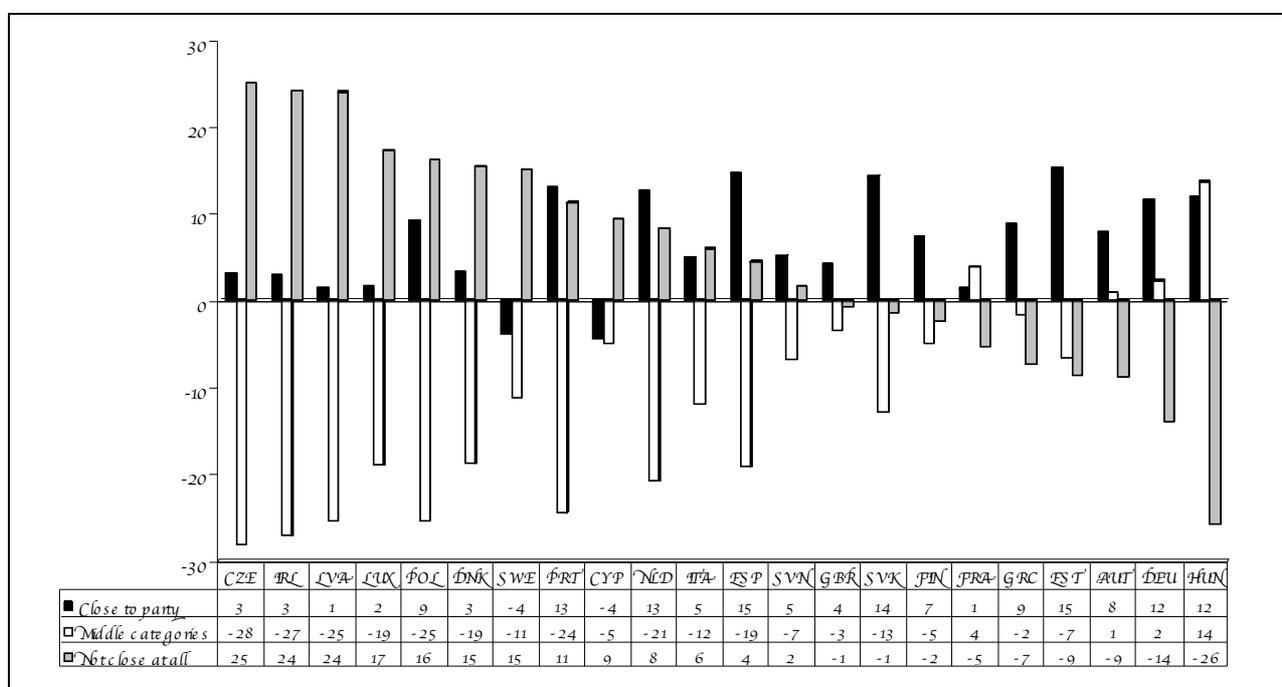
Note the percentage data contained within this figure is derived from a subtracting the EES 04 estimate from the EB 162 one. The middle categories for the EES04 party closeness question contain the sum of two response options (i.e. "fairly close" and "merely a sympathiser"). The "not close to any party" also includes non-committal responses. Some EES and FLEB 162 estimates are subject to rounding error and some totals may not be slightly inaccurate. Differences that are in bold are not significant at $p < .05$ level using a difference of proportions test.

When a comparison is made of the levels of party closeness across member states in these surveys one finds, as table 1 demonstrates, substantially different estimates. In general, FLEB 162 gives a more polarised view of party attachment in

Europe, where there are higher estimates of closeness and detachment from parties than that represented in EES 04. Consequently, within EES 04 there are generally more respondents who adopt middle (fairly close or sympathiser) positions than those who state in FLEB 162 that they feel “somewhat” close to a party.

Nonetheless, it is important to stress that both surveys’ estimates of the modal position for party closeness are identical for about half the countries examined (13 out of 22). In fact, the difference between the country level estimates of party closeness are higher in FLEB 162 in one set of eight countries, and higher in EES 04 for a different group of ten countries. In only two EU member states, i.e. Britain and France, are the estimates of party attachment close to being the same (i.e. ± 5 per cent) in both surveys. In fact the data presented in Figure 1 demonstrates that the implementation of different response options in EES 04 and FLEB 162 is most evident within specific countries.

Figure 1. Comparison of differences in estimates for the party closeness item implemented in Flash Eurobarometer 162 and the European Election Study surveys following the EP elections of June 2004 (per cent)



Note the percentage data contained within this figure is derived from a subtracting the EES 04 estimate from the FLEB 162 one. The middle categories for the EES 04 party closeness question contain the sum of two response options (i.e. “fairly close” and “merely a sympathiser”). The “not close to any party” also includes non-committal responses.

For example, the decision of EOS Gallup not to implement in FLEB 162 the two middle response options used in standard party closeness items as implemented in EES 04 (i.e. "fairly close" and "sympathiser" is replaced by "somewhat close") results in a dramatic increase in non-partisans (+25 per cent) in the Czech Republic. In contrast, on the extreme right of Figure 1 we observe that a similar comparison for Hungary yields to an equally sharp decline in non-attached respondents (-26 per cent).

The important lesson to be taken from the data presented in Table 1 and Figure 1 is that differences in the middle response options provided to respondents in party closeness questions have important effects in Europe. Furthermore, these effects appear to be mediated by national context. A key motivation underpinning the research reported in this paper is that these differences in estimates to the same party closeness question result from changes in the middle categories. Such differences, it will be argued, give students of mass attachment to political parties a unique insight into the nature of this mass-party linkage. Why this is the case depends fundamentally on how we conceptualise responses to party identification questions.

Conceptualisation of responses to party identification questions

The concept of party identification is built on two key ideas: (1) self identity and (2) extended time horizon (Campbell et al. 1960; Bartle 2003: 221). This concept implies stable and enduring attitudes toward a preferred party. Consequently, if a good measure of party identification is implemented we should observe, assuming the party identification concept is valid, stable response patterns. From a surveying perspective the idea of stability in responses to party identification questions stems from a particular conceptualisation of how respondents answer items during poll interviews.

The classic perspective that may be termed the "true-opinion theory" of survey response assumes that respondents have pre-existing attitudes on matters such as personal identification with a specific political party (Feldman 1995: 152).

From this perspective, the differences noted between EES 04 and FLEB 162 are the result of “non-attitudes” among respondents who answer survey questions randomly, or derive from “measurement error” due to faulty survey items (Converse 1964; Achen 1975).

The Belief-Sampling Model of survey response does not assume that a mass survey researcher can make a firm distinction between having attitudes and non-attitudes. Instead responses to survey questions are probabilistic rather than deterministic as the true-opinion theory assumes (Feldman 1995: 267; Tourangeau, Rips and Rasinski 2000). Consequently, if respondents are asked if they identify with a particular party and if they feel close to that party these may not be questions to which many respondents will have ready-made answers. In fact, there is strong reason to think that citizens do not think of political parties in these terms (Bartle 2003). Consequently, the differences we observe between EES 04 and FLEB 162 do not derive from respondents having no opinions or measurement error resulting from response option effects, but ensue from respondents using different “distributions of considerations” to answer both party closeness items (Zaller and Feldman 1992; Zaller 1992).

The fact that a change in the number of response options offered might have led respondents to use different considerations to answer the EES 04 and FLEB 162 questions is an intriguing proposition. Moreover, the Belief-Sampling Model of survey response suggests that it is unreasonable from a survey response perspective to assume that responses to party identification questions should exhibit enduring stability. The central insight here is that attitudes based on heterogeneous considerations may exhibit instability, i.e. the survey evidence suggests citizens do not know if they are attached to parties or not, but the underlying considerations may nonetheless be stable and enduring.

This is a subtle point for it suggests that political scientist’s and citizen’s conceptualisation of closeness to a party are different and the response effects observed when comparing EES 04 and FLEB 162 reflect reality. Citizens for the most part in Europe do not have ready-made answers to party closeness questions, as politics is for the most part an ephemeral consideration. Consequently, closeness to

parties as measured in surveys is not fixed because contextual factors (which determine which considerations are used) mediate the responses recorded. In fact, previous research has argued in a similar vein that fluctuations in levels of party identification can be explained in terms of exogenous factors such as retrospective assessments of the economy (Fiorina 1981; MacKuen, Erikson and Stimson 1990; Erikson, Stimson and MacKuen 2002).

From the Belief-Sampling Model perspective the difference in response options recorded in EES 04 and FLEB 162 should not be regarded as a methodological problem. Rather it should be seen as an opportunity to investigate how contextual factors can shape different patterns of responses measured and the likely effects of public debate if the agenda is framed in a particular manner (see Kinder and Sanders 1990). For example, why is it that the Czech Republic, Denmark, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg and Poland saw dramatic increases in those stating they were "not close to a party" while in Austria, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece and Slovakia we observe increases in those stating they were "close to a party"? Are we to believe this is a random process where the differences in responses observed between EES 04 and FLEB 162 are nothing more than evidence of respondents' non-attitudes and/or measurement error?

Within this paper we will adopt the Belief-Sampling Model conceptualisation of responses to party closeness questions and examine two key questions: (a) Is it possible to provide a generalised description of the differences across EU member states in the FLEB 162 and EES 04 estimates of party closeness? (b) What do such differences tell us about the nature of party attachment in Europe?

In attempting to answer these two questions we will structure our argument as follows. In the next section, we outline the main features of our data. This is followed by a brief review of party closeness used in cross-national research within Europe. Section three introduces a simple model of response effects to guide our understanding of the dynamics of responses to party closeness items. In the following section, we outline and discuss an aggregate level model of intra-EU differences in party closeness. Finally, in the conclusion we will endeavour to

indicate how our research sheds light on the nature of party identification in contemporary Europe.

Data

As noted in the introduction, two Europe-wide surveys will be used to examine level of party closeness in twenty-two European countries. While much commentary has been made of the differences in party systems between post-communist states and the older members of the EU this should not undermine the fact that all EU-25 member states adhere to a common set of liberal democratic principles that underpin membership in the European Union. Moreover, variation between party systems provides us with an opportunity to test the generality of concepts across a wider range of contexts, thereby giving us greater confidence in our concepts and political theories (Przeworski and Teune 1970; King, Keohane and Verba 1997).

In this respect, the elections to the European Parliament in June 2004 provide an unprecedented opportunity to examine central concepts such as party identification in a context that was common to all EU member states and where there was the occasion to undertake mass survey research. While there were a considerable number of national level surveys dealing with the European Elections, there are only two comprehensive post-election surveys that attempted to implement the same set of questions in all member states.

The European Election Study 2004 implemented a common questionnaire to representative national samples in twenty-four member states of the European Union. This research project focussed on election issues, campaign effects, attitudes toward the EU, voter turnout, electoral behaviour and voters' perceptions of parties. In most participating countries the EES 04 survey was fielded immediately following these elections. However, it was not possible to conduct a survey in Malta.² Belgium, Lithuania, Luxembourg are not included in the analysis undertaken here as there are no party closeness data for these countries.³

While a concerted effort was made to ensure that the questionnaires implemented in the 2004 European Election Study were identical across the various

² The European Election Study 2004 dataset are was taken from the European Election Study website: www.europeanelectionstudies.net

member states this was not always possible. For example, some discrepancies did arise in the wording of the party attachment questions (see, appendix). More will be said on this issue in the next section. Furthermore, the mode of interviewing was not standard in each country. While most country level datasets are derived from face-to-face surveying (e.g. Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, etc.), others were based on telephone interviews (e.g. Austria, Britain, Germany and Italy) while a postal survey was implemented in Ireland.

The second dataset employed in this research is Flash Eurobarometer 162 implemented by EOS Gallup Europe on behalf of the European Commission during the final two weeks of June 2004. A short survey of ten substantive questions with six demographic items was asked to representative national samples of adults (aged 18 years or more). EOS Gallup ensured that there was an average of one thousand respondents in all member states. For the most part, surveying was based on telephone interviews or face-to-face surveying in the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia because of concerns over the relatively limited number of fixed telephone lines in these states (Flash FLEB 162 Report, July 2004: 2). This data has been lodged and processed by the Zentralarchiv für Empirische Sozialforschung, Universität zu Köln. The documentation with this dataset provides an English and French version of the questionnaire. Unfortunately, the questionnaires implemented in other member state languages are not readily available. Therefore, it is assumed in this paper that the questionnaire implemented by EOS Gallup was essentially the same in all countries.

Having outlined the main features of our two survey datasets it is appropriate at this point to turn our attention to our topic of interest – the party closeness questions implemented. It is important in this respect to place this research in context and outline what has been learned in previous work on this topic.

³ It should be noted that some states within the EU are effectively composed of two distinct political regions, e.g. Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Germany (East and West) and UK (Britain and Northern Ireland) and should be treated as separate cases (Oppenhuis 1995; van der Eijk et al. 1996). While it would be desirable to take account of these socio-political realities the survey data available for analysis do not facilitate such a division where the primary goal is comparison between the EES 04 and FLEB 162 datasets.

Party closeness question in cross-national European surveys

Within the study of party attachment at a cross-national level it is closeness to *any* party that is of central concern. The type of the party attachment question used within Europe in comparative projects such as Eurobarometer and the series of European Elections Studies have attempted to adopt the same question in all countries. While the basic format of asking (1) “Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular party? If so, which party do you feel close to?” and (2) “Do you feel yourself to be very close to this party, fairly close, or merely a sympathiser?” is standard: the exact wording of the party attachment question has varied.⁴

These concerns are fundamentally important because even small wording changes have the potential to change response patterns dramatically (note Kaase 1975: 85; Norpoth 1978; Converse and Pierce 1985; Bartle 1999; Burden and Klofstad 2005). Within the Eurobarometer time series of party attachment measures there have been changes in the question format over time warranting caution (Katz 1985: 108; Schmitt 1989: 122-39; Schmitt and Holmberg 1995: 25). In fact within Eurobarometer there was between 1978 and 1994 at least three different types of party attachment questions, along with country specific variations (Sinnott 1998: 630ff.). These may be summarised as follows.

- Absolute version: This item type inquires if the respondent close to any *single* party.
- Relative version: Here the respondent is asked if they feel closer to one party from among all parties.
- Ordinal version: This question aims to elicit from a respondent the degree of closeness toward a specific party. Here closeness is graded within the main question text rather than within the response options.

Within the European Elections Study of 2004, a majority of countries implemented an absolute version of the party attachment question as the data presented in the appendix indicates. Only in Portugal and Poland was there a relative version of the party identification question asked. In other countries, there

⁴ The impact of question order, which is also known to influence party attachment responses, is not addressed here as the data examined derives (for the most part) from a standard questionnaire format and is of less concern here.

were minor linguistic deviations (e.g. Ireland), modified question structure (e.g. Northern Ireland) and different response options (e.g. Estonia and Hungary).

As noted earlier, the European Election Study was not the only surveying project that implemented a post-election poll. The European Commission had EOS Gallup Europe undertake a special Eurobarometer survey (FLEB 162) on its behalf in the two weeks following the 2004 elections to the European Parliament. Both EES 04 and FLEB 162 asked a party attachment question, with the latter seeking information relating only to the level of closeness to a political party.

Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular party? If so, which party do you feel close to? (A negative response is coded as "not close to any party") Do you feel yourself to be very close to this party, fairly close, or merely a sympathiser? (1) Very close; (2) Fairly close; (3) Merely a sympathiser; (4) Don't know / No answer [*European Election Study item, questions 30 and 30a*].

Do you feel close to any one of the political parties? (1) Yes, very close to one of the political parties; (2) Yes, somewhat close to one of the political parties; (3) No, not at all close to any of the political parties; (4) DK / No answer [*Flash Eurobarometer 162, question 10*].

This difference in question format can be important. Previous research undertaken by Barnes et al. (1992) has shown that the 'intensity' (party closeness) question tends to yield higher levels of self-reported partisanship than the 'direction' (party identification) question. The results presented earlier in Table 1 comparing the FLEB 162 intensity item and EES 04 direction question confirms this relationship. However, we do not believe that this question format difference explains the response patterns observed for two reasons. First, the inflation in 'intensity' estimates in FLEB 162 above that recorded in EES 04 is not uniform but exhibits significant variation (+3 to +15 per cent). This effect is much more pronounced in some countries (i.e. Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Slovakia and Spain) than others. Second, the party closeness item in FLEB 162 is the final question in the survey and comes directly after a recalled vote turnout in the last general election indicating at least some priming, similar to that involved in the direction question implemented in EES 04, is also likely to have been present. Third, Barnes et al. (1992: 227) also note that there is a high level of correlation between both

party identification and closeness scales at the individual level and they conclude that the party closeness question is a good comparative research measure.

While cognisant of the format differences identified by Barnes et al. (1992) we feel reasonably confident for the three reasons outlined above to argue that the EES 04 and FLEB 162 party closeness results do in fact give us directly comparable independent measures of party closeness across twenty-five member states of the European Union following the most extensive Europe-wide elections ever undertaken. Moreover, in terms of the typology of party identification questions outlined earlier, both EES 04 and FLEB 162 items are functionally equivalent in implementing an absolute measure of party closeness.

However, the decision of EOS Gallup to ask a single 'intensity' or generic party closeness question resulted in FLEB 162 using a different set of response options to that employed in the European Election Study item. In both surveys there are comparable "very close" and "not at all close" options; however, the middling categories are different. In the European Election Study there are two intermediate positions, i.e. "fairly close" and "merely a sympathiser", while in Flash Eurobarometer 162 there is a single middle category "somewhat close to one of the political parties."

This situation implies that we have the opportunity to gauge the impact of changing the response options on the answers given to a party closeness question across twenty-two European states at a single point in time. If closeness to party is a stable attitude we would expect to see very similar response profiles to the same question asked to a representative samples contemporaneously. However, as the number of response options implemented in EES 04 and FLEB 162 is different there is the expectation that this difference led respondents to assess their level of party closeness differently. The expectation derived from the Belief-Sampling Model is that respondents used different considerations to provide answers to the party closeness questions in the EES 04 and FLEB 162 surveys.

In this respect, this research argues that this relatively minor response option difference between absolute measures of party closeness is not simply a methodological nuisance, but has the potential to tell us important things about party identification in Europe. It is appropriate at this point to consider more carefully what effect changing the number of response options has on aggregate level

estimates of party closeness. To undertake this we will outline a simple model of response effects.

A simple model of response effects

The Belief-Sampling Model of survey response predicts that in different interview contexts respondents will interpret the questions asked by an interviewer differently. Reversing this logic, Kinder and Sanders (1990) have argued that different types of questions on the same issue can have similar effects to a change in context on observed survey responses as those associated with contextual changes. This is because by asking a specific sort of question respondents are primed in line with the logic of the Belief-Sampling Model to use particular considerations in providing an answer.⁵ However, by changing the wording, or format, of a survey question on the same issue very, different considerations may be used in formulating an answer. Consequently, we can say that different survey questions relating to a single topic illuminate different facets of the subject being examined.

The essential difference, as noted earlier, between the party closeness questions asked in EES 04 and FLEB 162 relates to use of a single intermediate or middle category by the latter. If we assume that party closeness survey questions refer to a single underlying attitude then each survey scale used to measure strength of party attachment is unidimensional in nature. Moreover, it is assumed that respondents, for the most part, answer party closeness questions sincerely. In concrete terms, this means that those interviewed select the response option closest to their own preferred position along the attitude dimension that represents their closeness (or lack of closeness) to any political party.

Therefore, if two nationally representative samples of respondents are presented with the same party closeness question, i.e. an absolute version, at the same point in time we would expect within the limits of sampling error the same results. However, if we modify this scenario and collapse two middle response options to a single choice this raises the important question of what effect will this have on the estimates of degree of closeness to political parties?

⁵ Zaller (1992: 59-61) refers to this idea that individuals feel differently about different aspects of the same issue as "Ambivalence Deduction."

What is likely to happen when the number of response options is changed?

With regard to the question just posed there would seem to be three possibilities: (1) *No effect*: the survey margins for both questions are very similar. (2) *Random effects*: a change in response format leads to different estimates where respondents drift in a haphazard manner away from the middle categories toward the polar options and (3) *Systematic effects*: here the reduction in the number of middle categories will lead to stronger differences emerging among certain subgroups and/or countries than others.⁶ The evidence presented earlier in Table 1 and Figure 1 demonstrates that the difference in response options implemented by FLEB 162 and EES 04 are at the country level systematic in nature. We will introduce a little later a simple categorisation of response effects expected and observed. However, at this point it seems appropriate to consider what insights might be gleaned from previous research on response option effects in mass surveys.

Most of the research on changes in response options deals with two main questions. The first stream that may be termed the “omitted and offered” response option effects literature investigates the impact of including or excluding “don’t know” or middle category alternatives (Schuman and Presser 1981). The second stream investigates what is the optimal number of response categories that should be used with specific types of survey questions (Preston and Coleman 2000). Unfortunately, there seems (as far as we are aware) to be little research on changing the number of response options in party closeness questions although changes to the party attachment question itself and questionnaire effects have been the subject of a considerable amount of research (e.g. Converse 1985; Heath and Pierce 1992; McAllister and Wattenberg 1995; Sinnott 1998; Bartle 1999, 2003; Clarke et. al. 2004: 196-99; Burden and Klofstad 2005). Here we will outline from the results of previous research on response option effects and some expectations regarding the differences observed between the FLEB 162 and EES 04 party closeness items.

⁶ It is important to be clear here that we do not have a split sample or experimental design. Therefore, we cannot speak of individual level effects directly. Here we are making a comparison between two different surveys undertaken across twenty-two countries at the same point in time. Valid inferences based on comparing the estimates of FLEB 162 and EES 04 are based on assuming both surveys are equally representative of national electorates and do not exhibit methodological differences that would systematically bias estimates of party closeness. We are satisfied given the documentation available to us that these assumptions are reasonable.

Schuman and Presser (1981: 171) state on the basis of their experimental research in the 1970s that differences in the number of response options offered to respondents do not lead to systematically different response patterns on the basis of level of education.⁷ However, it seems that the effect of omitting or offering a middle category “is larger among less intense respondents than among more intense individuals.” Our expectations deriving from this research is that those who feel closer to a political party or are firmly non-partisans are less likely to be influenced by replacing the “fairly close” and “sympathiser” options than all others.

Within the second stream of research examining the optimal use of response categories, the current wisdom seems to be that data quality is likely to improve as the number of response options increases (Andrews 1984; Rodgers et al., 1989; Krosnick and Fabrigar, 1997). Research based on “real life experiences” (i.e. consumer satisfaction ratings) has found on the basis of reliability scores- indices of validity and discriminating power- convergent validity scores seven to ten point scales perform better than scale with two to four response options. Where respondents have been allowed to rate scales, those scales with two to four response choices are judged favourably in terms of convenience (i.e. facilitate a quick response) but unfavourably in terms of being allowed to adequately express opinions (Preston and Coleman 2000).

In short, the party closeness scales used in EES 04 and FLEB 162 are likely to have similar levels of reliability and validity – a level that is likely to be lower if a seven point scale had been used. From this optimal use of response categories perspective there should be little difference between the results derived from EES 04 and FLEB 162.

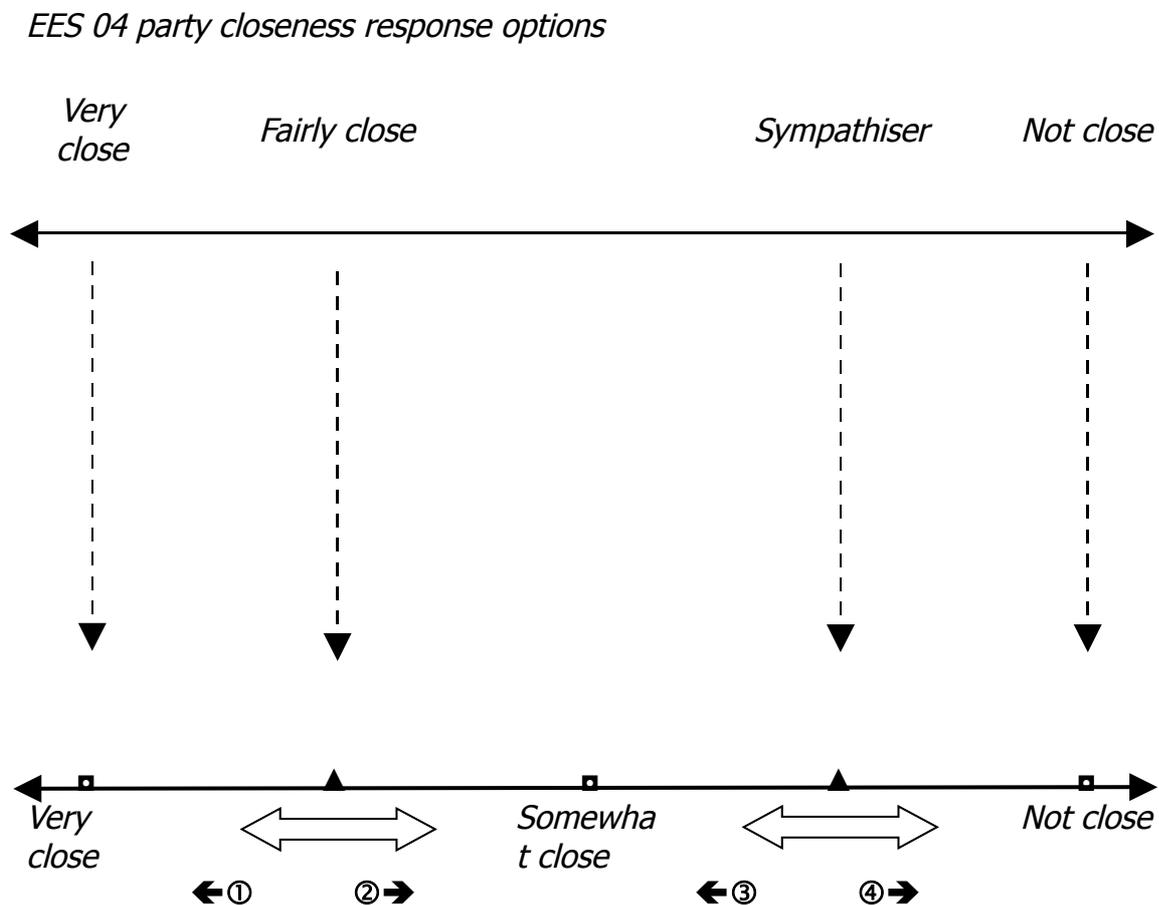
A spatial representation of response option change

In order to gain a better understanding of the puzzle being examined let us represent the situation in a simple comparative manner. We will consider a

⁷ The mechanism underlying this education effect is based on the assumption that “a middle position among the better educated would be more crystallised [...] as a result we should observe “a disproportionate number of the less educated [moving] from the polar positions to the middle position on the offered form.” Consequently, this would alter the correlation between education and middle versus polar positions on that form” (Schuman and Presser 1981: 171).

hypothetical respondent who had the opportunity to answer both the EES 04 and FLEB 162 party closeness questions.⁸ In Figure 2 there is a simplified graphical representation of the sources of differences between the party closeness question asked in EES 04 and FLEB 162. At the anchor points of both party closeness scales we assume that those with strong fixed attitudes toward parties will select the same response option in both interview situations.

Figure 2. A simple spatial model examining differences in responses when the number of response options changes between survey items such as party closeness



FLEB 162 party closeness response options

Note the large white bi-directional arrows at the bottom of this figure relate to hypothesised flows of responses where respondents who give specific responses to EES 04 would then place themselves on

⁸ There is the danger here of making invalid inferences by adopting such a research strategy where we infer individual level effects from aggregated (country) level data, i.e. the ecological inference problem (note, Achen and Shively 1995). It is not possible to model individual effects directly from the data available so all analyses refer to aggregate level effects.

the FLEB 162 scale. For the anchor points of each scale (i.e. "very close" and "not close") it is assumed that response preferences are invariant and there would be a direct translation from the EES 04 to the FLEB 162 scale. The circled numbers 1 through 4 refer to directions of respondents' flows from the middle response categories of EES 04 when 'transposed' onto the FLEB 162 scale. These numbers are convenient for identifying the direction of hypothesised net flows of responses when moving from the EES 04 party closeness scale to the FLEB 162 one. Four main effects may be used to provide a generalised description about the net differences observed between FLEB 162 and EES 04. These may be summarised as follows.

- 1. Weak fortifying effect: Differences ensue from flows along directions indicated by arrows 1 and 2 and 3.*
- 2. Strong fortifying effect: Differences between FLEB 162 and EES 04 ensue from respondents shifting preferences in the directions indicated by arrows 1 and 3.*
- 3. Strong attenuating effect: Net differences between FLEB 162 and EES 04 are explained by flows in directions indicated by arrows 2 and 4.*
- 4. Polarising (net positive or negative) effect: Response patterns in FLEB 162 reveal attenuated middle category strength when compared to EES 04 and thus shifts in opinion in the direction indicated by arrows 1 and 4.*

The argument proposed here is that in spatial terms attitudes such as party closeness may be seen as zones of acceptance or rejection, where those who feel very close or not at all close to a party find smaller regions along the party closeness dimension acceptable. They are therefore constrained to give polar answers regardless of how the middle options are reformulated. In contrast, those with less intense attitudes will have greater latitudes of acceptable opinion covered on the party closeness dimension and hence are more likely to be affected by the omission or inclusion of response options.⁹ This expectation forms the basis for our first hypothesis, which may be expressed as follows.

H.1 There will be a non-significant difference in the responses to same party closeness for those at the anchor points, i.e. "very close" and "not at all close" regardless of changes in the middle categories of the party closeness item.¹⁰

⁹ At an aggregate level, Stimson (1991) offers a similar type of argument when developing his concept of "public mood" and its alternation between liberal and conservative positions over time. At an individual level this spatial perspective is similar to Sherif and Sherif's (1969) 'social judgement' perspective within social psychology.

¹⁰ Schuman and Presser (1981: 169) propose a similar hypothesis where they test that "the marginals for Omitted and Offered forms, excluding all middle responses, will not differ beyond sampling error". They found that with 15 out of 16 liberal-conservative items the inclusion/exclusion does not alter the size of the polar response groups. Our results are less clear cut as a chi-square test indicates significant differences ($p < .05$) in 6 out of 22 countries.

In this respect, our expectation is that almost all of the response differences will be observed in the middle options of both scales. However, there are three possibilities each for the “fairly close” and “sympathiser” categories (from the EES 04 question) to choose (1) “very close”, (2) “somewhat close” or (3) “not at all close” responses for the FLEB 162 item (i.e. a total of six possibilities).

Our simple spatial representation, shown in Figure 2, presents an idealised situation where the “fairly close” and “sympathiser” response options implemented in EES 04 are equidistant from three possible answers offered to respondents in FLEB 162. There is no compelling reason to think that this representation, although fitting in with the ordinal logic of both sets of response options will match closely with reality. The key merit of our simple spatial model is to posit an important counterfactual. What would those respondents who chose “fairly close” and “sympathiser” options in the EES 04 survey do if they were faced with the FLEB 162 questionnaire? Our simple answer using a proximity rule is that they would have chosen the FLEB 162 response that was closest to the more differentiated response options available in EES 04.

An important theoretical question here is the degree to which the points on both scales match up – for example, is the “fairly close” option in EES 04 closer to “very close” or “somewhat close” within FLEB 162. Such considerations also reflect a more general curiosity about the relative distances of response options from each other across both scales. If it was possible to calculate these values we would be in a position to predict using the standard proximity criteria used within spatial models where differences between EES 04 and FLEB 162 would occur.¹¹

The key point here is that if the EES 04 and FLEB 162 party closeness scales are ordinal with dissimilar distances between response options then this has important implications for changing the scale from a four (ESS 04) to a three point one (FLEB 162). For example, if the “fairly close” option in EES 04 were much closer to the “very close” choice than the “sympathiser” option in FLEB 162 this would imply

¹¹ Given the different metrics of the party closeness items implemented in EES 04 and FLEB 162 it seems unlikely that a unidimensional scaling or unfolding technique could be used to achieve this task.

that most “fairly close” respondents in EES 04 should select the “very close” option in FLEB 162. This has the effect of boosting estimates of party closeness.

Such speculations highlight that some process of “sorting” must take place during survey interviews where respondents who would choose “fairly close” and “sympathiser” options in an EES 04 survey are forced to choose something else when an FLEB 162 type of party closeness question is used. At an aggregate level, we should be able to observe a number of response option effects through examining the differences between EES 04 and FLEB 162 survey estimates of party closeness. We expect to see two general effects – a positive and negative impact on measured levels of party closeness. Within these two broad effects there are likely to be more specific patterns.

Figure 2 highlights a number of possibilities that are defined primarily in terms of strong partisanship. First, we may see a growth in both strong and weak partisanship at the expense of the non-partisan category. In short, a *weak fortifying* process leads respondents to positions that reject the non-partisan label. Second, implementation of the FLEB 162 rather than EES 04 party closeness question may have a *strong fortifying effect* on strength of party closeness where the “very close” category gains at the expense of all others. Third, use of less response options for measuring party closeness may induce a *strong attenuating effect* where respondents opt for the non-partisan category. Lastly, change in response option format may have a *polarising effect* where respondents who would choose middle categories in the EES 04 question no longer take an intermediate position on the partisanship scale. Here we may expect some to adopt a strong partisan stance (i.e. positive swing) and others to espouse non-partisanship (i.e. a negative shift).

These dynamics are perhaps easier to visualize in Figure 2. The solid black triangle symbols at the bottom of this figure on the FLEB 162 dimension represent the direct translation of the “fairly close” and “sympathiser” options from the EES 04 scale. As we can see the spatial proximity logic of this simple model suggests flows of responses in different directions as indicated by the large bi-directional arrows. The small dark arrows identified by circled numerals indicate specific differences

between FLEB 162 and EES 04. On the basis of these simple theoretical expectations we may formulate a second hypothesis.

H.2 Response option effects will be observable in two broad patterns of difference between the EES 04 and FLEB 162 party closeness estimates. Moreover, the presence of distinct response effects patterns implies that the null hypothesis of no effects should be rejected.

As was mentioned earlier, in terms of the Belief-Sampling Model of survey response we expect different contexts to influence the process of survey response in a differential manner. Consequently, with a sample of twenty-two countries with different histories, institutions, party systems and socio-political patterns there is strong reason to think that country level factors would have been important. In the next section, we will endeavour to build on the insights from our simple model of response effects and outline some theoretical expectations as to what national and individual level factors might help explain cross-national variation in the response option effects observed in Table 1.

National context and differences in party closeness as measured in EES 04 and FLEB 162

It is important to keep in mind that our main interest in this paper is explaining differences in estimates to party closeness questions in EES 04 and FLEB 162. Consequently, we are not explaining cross-national levels of party identification or detachment, but the aggregate differences in responses to survey questions whose main difference stems from having a dissimilar number of middle response options.

Here we have two dependent variables, change in the estimates of those feeling “very close” and those who do felt “not at all close” to a party. These variables are distinct because as noted earlier they refer in the former case to

respondents with fixed and stable attitudes or in the latter case those whose opinions are changeable. Consequently, while we expect that variables that are associated with strong levels of party identification will help explain the difference in estimates of party closeness between EES 04 and FLEB, this should not be true for those with no party identification.

The change in response options between EES 04 question on party closeness and that implemented in FLEB 162 involves a comparison between two different types of absolute measure of closeness to a single party. In effect, the FLEB 162 question would seem to be a more absolute or "harder" measure of party attachment than that implemented in EES 04. In this respect we will attempt to specify more clearly why the aggregate level response patterns observed in EES 04 and FLEB 162 differ systematically across countries.

National context and differential response patterns in party closeness

The central argument tested here is that differences in responses to the EES 04 and FLEB 162 questions were influenced by the institutional context prevailing in each EU member state. We will test two dependent variables relating to the polar ends of the party closeness scales used in EES 04 and FLEB 162, i.e. (1) differences in "close to no party" measures, and (2) differences in "close to party". This strategy reflects directly on our goal to see what contextual factors might be associated with the different estimates made by EES 04 and FLEB 162 on "very close" or "not close at all" to a party.

Our assumption is that the contextual factors that are known from previous research to be associated with different levels of party identification will also be important in helping to explain the differences observed between FLEB 162 and EES 04. In this respect, we will build on the work of Huber et al. (2005) and test a number of hypotheses. We will not repeat here, for reasons of brevity, the social psychological and retrospective evaluative theoretical perspectives that inform Huber et al.'s (2005) choice of independent variables other than to say that we expect similar relationships to be present in our data.

Methodological effects:

H.3 Survey methodology effects will have an important impact on the difference in estimates of party closeness noted because relative questions yield higher levels of identification. Therefore, countries that use a relative item will have lower measures of “close to no party” (Sinnott 1998). The use of relative questions will not have a significant impact on estimates of those feel “close to a party”.

Electoral systems party or candidate based:

H.4 In electoral systems where there is a categorical ballot this compels voters to give their vote either to a candidate or party. As most EU member states electoral systems are based on parties we expect that the institutional rules promotes loyalty to a party and there will be a significant relationship between this variable and the difference in estimates in both surveys.

H.5 The experience of direct presidential elections will promote candidate-centred politics. In presidential systems voters are exposed to election campaigns that are not always strongly centred on parties. Consequently, there should be a significant relationship between this variable and differences in survey estimates made by FLEB 162 and EES 04.

H.6 Electoral systems that use Single Member Districts also promote candidate rather than party based politics. Here citizens’ primary identification is with a single political representative of their constituency rather than a national party. For this reason we expect there should be a significant relationship between this variable and the survey estimates observed.

Representative factors:

H.7 In political systems where there are a higher effective number of legislative parties, we expect there to be a significant difference between the EES 04 and FLEB 162 estimates. This is because representative governments with higher number of parties reflect a wider range of opinions. In surveying terms this implies that respondents are likely to be exposed to a broader range of considerations when answering party closeness questions. In contrast, countries with a low number of effective number of parties will have a more competitive view of parties and question format effects will have less impact, as higher numbers of voters will be aligned with specific parties.

Mobilising factor:

H.8 There should be significant differences between the two surveys estimates of party closeness because in some countries citizens were exposed to higher levels of electoral mobilisation as measured by the presence of concurrent elections. Differences in levels of mobilisation impact on the considerations used by respondents to answer survey questions.

Systemic factors:

H.9 Differences in support for the political system, as measured by level of satisfaction with democracy, will also accentuate the differences recorded in the EES 04 and FLEB 162 estimates of party closeness. This is because respondents align their attitudes toward parties with their general orientation toward the entire political system. Consequently, in those states with higher levels of satisfaction with democracy there will be more respondents willing to state that they are partisan and less so in countries where satisfaction with democracy is relatively low.

Empirical results

In our simple model of response effects, we made the important assumption (made explicit in H.1 in our model presented in Figure 2) that respondents with strong, or perhaps fixed, attitudes toward party attachment would respond consistently to the same party closeness question, regardless of changes in the response options. In order to test our first hypothesis a difference of proportions test was undertaken comparing responses from FLEB 162 and EES 04. The results of these tests are given in the final three columns of Table 1.

Here we can see that this hypothesis must be partly rejected at a country level. There are statistically significant differences in estimates in a majority of countries (18 out of 22 for both polar response options). However, as Table 1 reveals the core proportion of "very close" party identifiers never declines below the estimates provided in EES 04.¹² In contrast, the proportion espousing non-

¹² Table 1 shows that Cyprus and Sweden are exceptions to this statement. However, these deviations might still be expected as resulting from sampling error. The Cyprus sample in EES 04 has 500 cases so all estimates have a sampling error of (± 4 per cent). More generally, using a 95 per cent confidence for poll estimates suggests that one in twenty surveys undertaken will have sample estimates that are more than 3 per cent from the true population value. For this reason alone we would expect one country in a set of twenty-two countries to deviate from expectations.

partisanship varies by a considerable margin (-26 to +25 per cent) as Figure 1 demonstrates.

This result is important for three reasons. First, a combined analysis of EES 04 and FLEB 162 datasets suggests that the attitudes of those stating that they are “close” to a party in Europe are intensely held positions. This is because omitting and re-labelling a middle category (as occurred in FLEB 162) does not diminish the level of party closeness. Secondly, in terms of the spatial logic outlined in Figure 2, the idea that the anchor points on the closeness scale are defined by restricted regions of acceptance is only true for “very close” attitudes. This implies that non-partisans are a heterogeneous group composed of weak and completely de-aligned citizens. Lastly, EES 04 provides a lower bound estimate of the level of party attachment within the EU. However, it is not possible to provide a similar estimate for non-partisans for the reasons just noted.

Table 2. Comparison of response results for the party closeness item implemented in Flash Eurobarometer 162 and the European Election Study surveys following the EP elections of June 2004 (per cent)

<i>Differences in wording impact</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Net differences (%)</i>			<i>Categories of effects (+ / -)</i>		
		<i>Close to a party</i>	<i>Middle categories</i>	<i>Not close to a party</i>	<i>Close to a party</i>	<i>Middle categories</i>	<i>Not close to a party</i>
Positive partisan impact							
<i>1c. Weak fortifying effect</i>							
	Hungary	12	14	-26	Plus	Plus	Negative
	Germany	12	2	-14	Plus	Plus	Negative
	Austria	8	1	-9	Plus	Plus	Negative
	France	1	4	-5	Plus	Plus	Negative
<i>1a. Strong fortifying effect</i>							
	Estonia	15	-7	-9	Plus	Negative	Negative
	Slovakia	14	-13	-1	Plus	Negative	Negative
	Greece	9	-2	-7	Plus	Negative	Negative
	Finland	7	-5	-2	Plus	Negative	Negative
	Britain	4	-3	-1	Plus	Negative	Negative
<i>1b. Polarising effect (net positive)</i>							
	Spain	15	-19	4	Plus	Negative	Plus
	Netherlands	13	-21	8	Plus	Negative	Plus
	Portugal	13	-24	11	Plus	Negative	Plus
	Slovenia	5	-7	2	Plus	Negative	Plus
Negative partisan impact							
<i>2a. Strong attenuating effect</i>							
	Sweden	-4	-11	15	Negative	Negative	Plus
	Cyprus	-4	-5	9	Negative	Negative	Plus
<i>2b. Polarising effect (net negative)</i>							
	Czech Republic	3	-28	25	Plus	Negative	Plus
	Denmark	3	-19	15	Plus	Negative	Plus
	Ireland	3	-27	24	Plus	Negative	Plus
	Latvia	1	-25	24	Plus	Negative	Plus
	Luxembourg	2	-19	17	Plus	Negative	Plus
	Italy	5	-12	6	Plus	Negative	Plus
	Poland	9	-25	16	Plus	Negative	Plus

Note the percentage data contained within the net difference columns is derived from a subtracting the EES 04 estimate from the FLEB 162 one. The middle categories for the EE S04 party closeness question contain the sum of two response options (i.e. "fairly close" and "merely a sympathiser"). The "not close to any party" also includes non-committal responses. Grey subsections of the table indicate theoretically expected effects (i.e. largest percentages). Bold data not in grey zones refer to subsidiary effects. Differences that are in bold in the "categories of effects" section of this table (i.e. final three columns) are not significant at $p < .05$ level using a difference of proportions test.

The evidence presented in Table 2 confirms our second hypothesis. Here we predicted that we would to see significant differences in the response patterns to party closeness implemented in EES 04 and FLEB 162. Moreover, these differences are of two main types as outlined in our simple spatial model. In one block of fourteen countries the net effect of the FLEB 162 party closeness item was to increase the level of partisanship, while in the remaining group of eight EU member states the effect was negative.

Aggregate level regression analyses

In essence, the four models reported in Table 3 are best thought of as modelling bias in responses between FLEB 162 and EES 04. Our primary interest is in explaining the differences in estimates between these surveys on the basis of institutional or contextual factors. Overall we have demonstrated that the differences in responses across twenty-two EU member states is not random and that much of this variation can be explained in terms of the variables outlined in the methodological, electoral, representative, mobilising and systemic hypotheses outlined earlier.

Our methodological variable is important because as predicted it explains change in responses for the “not close” to a party, but has no significant impact on the difference in answers across the two post-European Election surveys to the “very close” option. This fits in with the logic of our simple model of survey response where those who feel close to a party with have some of the highest levels of attitude stability.

Another important finding from our regression results is the powerful role which electoral factors play in explaining differences in survey response. More specifically, the categorical ballot paper variable seems to have an impact on difference in responses in EES 04 and FLEB 162 at both ends of the party closeness scale. Obviously, the mechanisms operating at the “very close” and “not close” poles are different; however, the key point is that this electoral factor has an across the board influence on survey response patterns.

Our regression models also show that the extent to which national political systems are candidate or party centred is important. However, in this case different

facets of this characteristic operate on either end of the party closeness scale. In Model 1, we see that countries which have direct presidential elections help explain differences in the EES 04 and FLEB 162 survey estimates of "close to no party". In contrast, Models 2 and 4 demonstrate the presence of Single Member Districts is associated with changes in estimates of "very close" responses.

With regard to political representation, we observe from Models 1 and 3 that an effective number of legislative parties influence the differences in responses for "close to no party" respondents. The implication here is that the number of parties involved in legislative politics does not influence those with strong partisan opinions. Therefore, it would seem that considerations on the current structure of the legislature (and perhaps government) are most influential in motivating heterogeneous responses from those who are by their own admission non-partisan.

The impact of concurrent elections on different survey estimates of strong ("very close") partisanship is to increase the level of deviation between survey estimates. It would seem that in comparison with member states that only had European Elections the impact of additional electoral mobilising campaigns led to some fluidity in citizens' estimations of their degree of partisanship. In a similar manner, variance in satisfaction with a democracy variable is also associated with greater volatility in response to the "very close" response option. These two findings taken together are interesting in that they show that response instability to party closeness questions is driven by both short (concurrent elections and campaigns) and long-term factors (level of systemic support as measured by satisfaction with democracy).

Table 3. OLS regression models of differences in estimates for level of party closeness between FLEB 162 and EES 04 across twenty-two EU member states, Summer 2004

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	
(Constant)	0.38 (8.86)	7.20 (3.08)	** 0.69 (10.09)	12.00 (5.91)	*
Absolute – relative party closeness question together	22.73 (5.14)	*** 2.48 (1.93)	23.68 (5.01)	*** 3.06 (2.94)	
Categorical ballot for EP04: Ballot allows a single vote for a party/candidate	10.25 (4.39)	** 9.72 (2.44)	*** 13.96 (4.55)	*** 9.42 (2.67)	**
Direct presidential elections	16.43 (9.37)	*	16.64 (8.46)	* 1.94 (4.96)	
Effective number of legislative parties (2003)	3.38 (1.83)	*	3.50 (1.72)	* 0.92 (1.01)	
Concurrent elections		7.94 (3.42)	** 10.52 (6.09)	8.25 (3.57)	**
Single Member Districts		7.41 (3.09)	** 2.86 (5.65)	8.11 (3.31)	**
Level of satisfaction with democracy in country		0.14 (0.04)	*** 0.11 (0.08)	0.16 (0.05)	***
R	0.85	0.80	0.90	0.81	
R Square	0.72	0.64	0.81	0.66	
Adjusted R Square	0.65	0.52	0.72	0.50	
Std. Error of the Estimate	7.88	4.02	7.04	4.12	
N	22	22	22	22	

Note in Models 1 and 3 the dependent variable is the difference in the "not close" to any party estimates (i.e. FLEB 162 minus EES 04), while in Models 2 and 4 the dependent variable is the difference in the "very close" to a party estimates. Details of the independent variables are given in the appendix. Standard errors are in parentheses. All coefficients are positive as they refer to differences in responses between FLEB 162 and EES 04.

Conclusion

In this paper we have addressed an important puzzle where two large pan European surveys ostensibly measuring the same concept – closeness to political parties – provide very different estimates of party attachment across most EU member states. Simple statistical tests undertaken at the national level indicate that the difference in response profiles is important. One might argue in a similar manner to Robert Groves (1989: 465) that: "If explicit alternative response categories are offered (with whatever meaning) they will be chosen by respondents who would

have opted for other response categories without them. At this level the interpretation of the finding is close to a tautology ...”

In this paper we have attempted to move beyond this tautology by using insights derived from the Belief-Sampling Model of survey response. We have argued that the difference in response options offered in EES 04 and FLEB 162 resulted in systematic cross-national differences in measured levels of party closeness. Moreover, we have demonstrated in this paper that it is possible to explain a large portion of the variance in the responses given in the two post-European Election studies in terms of institutional factors operating at the national level.

The fact that it is possible to explain deviation in the responses to two party closeness questions in terms of institutional factors tells us two important things. First, many respondents do not have fixed ready-made answers to party identification questions. There is the suggestion here that many citizens do not think of political parties in this manner. Second, with relatively small changes in question format (where the number of middle response options was altered), respondents in different national contexts behave in systematically different ways. The key implication here is that responses to party closeness (and identification) questions are shaped by cues that are not directly related to political parties themselves, but refer to the institutional environment in which they operate. In this sense, the differences in responses observed across EES 04 and FLEB 162 reflect the degree to which citizens place parties in context when deciding on their level of closeness. More generally this suggests that party identification while primarily social psychological in conception also has an important institutional component for many citizens who are not strong party identifiers.

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Appendix

Types of party attachment question asked in the European Parliament Election Study of 2004 (EES 04)

Country	PID question format available on EES04 website	Type of question	Notes
Austria	Yes	Absolute	
Britain	Yes	Absolute	
Cyprus	Yes	Absolute	The term "feel close to a party" doesn't make much sense in Greek although the term was used.
Czech Republic	Yes	Absolute	
Denmark	Yes	Absolute	
Estonia *	Yes	Absolute	The response option "sympathizer" was implemented as "supporter". This is likely to reduce the number of respondents stating closeness to a party.
Finland	Yes	Absolute	
France	No	Absolute(?)	
Germany	Yes	Absolute	
Greece	Yes	Absolute	The term "feel close to a party" doesn't make much sense in Greek although the term was used.
Hungary *	Yes	Absolute	Sympathizer option translated as the respondent finds a party "sympathetic". This is likely to reduce the number of respondents stating closeness to a party.
Ireland	Yes	Absolute	Use of the additional word "usually" in the main question text (similar to the ANES item).
Italy	Yes	Absolute	
Latvia	Yes	Absolute	
Luxembourg	Yes	Absolute	
Netherlands	No	Absolute(?)	
Northern Ireland	Yes	Absolute	Use of the word "feel" instead of "consider" and question structure has three rather than two parts. This question may have an affective rather than cognitive interpretation resulting in attenuated closeness estimates (see, Burden and Klofstad 2005).
Poland	Yes	Relative	Question assumes that there is one party among all the Polish parties that the respondent feels closer to. For this reason this item is not an absolute question. However, it is not clearly a relative item either.
Portugal	Yes	Relative	Respondents were asked if they felt closer to one party from among all the parties present in Portugal.
Slovakia	Yes	Absolute	
Slovenia	Yes	Absolute	
Spain	Yes	Absolute	
Sweden	Yes	Absolute	

Note the party attachment was not asked in all countries participating in EES 04 project. The mode of interviewing varied where face-to-face interviewing was used in Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark,

Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Northern Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain. A postal survey (as part of a post-general 2002 election panel study) was implemented in Ireland. Elsewhere, telephone interviewing was used. * In two countries the "sympathiser" response option caused problems due to linguistic difficulties, where the term "supporter" or finding the party "sympathetic" was used. Such strategies could be interpreted as changing the logic or meaning of the party closeness question.

Details of the independent variables used in the OLS regression models reported in Table 3

Variable description	Source
Absolute – relative party closeness question together, (absolute questions coded zero, relative items plus one, and specific items asked in Hungary and Cyprus plus one)	Derived from an analysis of EES 04 questionnaires (see previous table)
Categorical ballot for EP04: Ballot allows a single vote for a party/candidate (contrasts with ordinal ballot that allows voters to determine who is elected)	Farrell and Scully (2005)
Direct presidential elections are held	Golder (2004); Other sources
Effective number of legislative parties, adjustment for small parties (2003)	Royce, Cox and Pachón (2004)
Concurrent elections of all types (local, regional and national) with the June 10-13 2004 elections to the European Parliament	Richard Rose, EP elections Report (2004): IDEA publication
Single Member District electoral system used in a country	Seddon et al. (2003) Farrell and Scully (2005)
Level of satisfaction with democracy in country	EB 61, Autumn 2004