

# **Lies and selective memory: Explaining the differences in misreporting between first and second-order elections**

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## Introduction

Analyzing the European Union's evolution as democratic entity became a crucial point in recent scholarly work. As the European Union develops on a structural and a conceptual level, getting more and more sophisticated, new areas of possible research arise, enabling scholars to provide a deeper understanding of the Union. Beginning with the first European Parliamentary elections in 1979, a new realm of studies opened up: the electoral behavior and the party competition on a European level. Just one year later, Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt (1980) proposed a categorization for these elections, asserting that the EP elections can be considered as *second-order national elections* where "one second-order political arena is related to nine different first-order arenas" (Reif and Schmitt, 1980: 3). Second-order elections such as local or municipal elections have less-at-stake, and they are overshadowed by the national political arena (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Since then, the nine became twenty-five in the 2004 EP elections and 27 in the 2009 EP elections, but the second-order election theory seems to hold (Schmitt, 2005). Nevertheless, the EU has undergone several institutional and macro-contextual changes that may influence the individual voting behavior (van der Eijk et al, 1996; Rohrschneider and Clark, 2008).

A considerable part of this research carried out on electoral behavior uses post-election surveys as data sources, thus a traditional aspect related to this type of instrument should be discussed, namely *overreporting*. Surveys that use the vote question can identify the self-reported turnout, but this does not reflect the real turnout, because people tend to misreport their participation. Identifying and quantifying misreporting is essential from the perspective of survey design and implementation, but also yields complementary information on the social context of the elections. Research in this field mentions social desirability and memory failure as possible determinants of overreporting (Belli et al, 1999; Belli et al, 2001; Karp and Brockington, 2005), but non-response error also influences the possible measurement of misreporting (Jackman, 1999). Social desirability means that respondents of post-election surveys feel a social pressure – participation on elections being the "socially accepted and desired behavior" - to indicate that they voted, although this is not always true. The memory failure theory proposes that misreporting is strongly dependent on the distance in time between the elections and the date of interview (Belli et al, 1999; Stocké, 2005). The bigger the distance in time, the higher the misreporting will be, because the respondents cannot recall whether they have voted or not.

Regular European Parliamentary elections and the ongoing construction of a European identity (Scheuer, 1999; Scheuer and Schmitt, 2007; Thomassen and Schmitt, 2004) raise the question of the existence of any ‘social desirability’ when it comes to the self-reported turnout to EP elections. For a comprehensive answer to this question, we must consider the overreporting in national elections as a point of reference, formulating hypotheses about how the overreporting changes when different types of elections are investigated in the same country. The comprehensive surveys of the Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems (CSES) and the European Election Surveys give us the possibility to analyze the differences in overreporting between national elections and EP elections. Analyzing the determinants of these differences helps better understanding the perceptions about the European Union and the emergence of a social pressure for the EP elections. Finally, it provides empirical evidence for the debate between determinants of overreporting, introducing a new geographical scene to a field dominated by studies on the United States elections.

By looking at overreporting figures for the EP election studies, one could observe that there is a very high overreporting even compared to national election studies, falsely concluding that there are considerable social pressures to report European electoral participation. But considering the nature of this phenomenon, we must also take into consideration that this can be an artifact generated by the low levels of turnout in the EP elections or it could be linked to differing questionnaire collection dates. Throughout this paper we argue that using only the raw overreporting numbers for the EP elections is misleading. We consider as a baseline for comparison the overreporting in national election surveys. We scrutinize the hypothesis that social desirability should be lower in EP election studies than in the case of national ones. This hypothesis is theoretically grounded in the macro-theory of second-order elections. Less salience and interest towards the EU (and towards European Parliament) results in less social pressure, decreasing the social desirability to indicate that one voted in the EP elections. However, we have to make sure that an increased difference in overreporting is not determined by memory failure. In order to account for this possibility, we identify and isolate the differences in the elapsed time between the elections and the administration of the survey.

First, we employ quantitative analysis using linear regression. In order to assess individual level misreporting, vote validation would be necessary. To address this problem we shift the unit of analysis to countries, using survey based estimated turnout and official turnout to measure misreporting (Belli et al, 2006). Using country level aggregate data

implicitly reduces the sample size, and combining the EES and CSES dataset also generates the need of compatibility. Due to the nature of the research question and the limitations of quantitative analysis on small sample sizes, we extend the array of methods employing qualitative analysis (QCA). The latter is a method designed by Charles Ragin (Ragin, 1987) in pursuit of a tool able to assess the necessity and sufficiency of configurations of factors (causal conditions) for the occurrence of an event (outcome). While our data is rather quantitative and the nature of our research question is statistical, the number of observations that we have makes the qualitative analysis indispensable.

The next section offers a theoretical background for the overreporting determinants and the categorization of the EU elections in order to formulate testable hypotheses on the differences in overreporting between national elections and EP elections. The third section presents the method of constructing the aggregate-country level database and the proposed methods of analysis. The interpretation of the results and the re-linking them to theory is followed by discussions and conclusions.

## **Theoretical background**

The theoretical framework needed to build relevant models when assessing the difference in overreporting covers two aspects. Since overreporting can be linked to how elections are perceived, we will analyze the theory of second-order elections. More precisely, some relevant characteristics of the European elections will account for the expectations related to overreporting.

### ***Theory of Second Order Elections***

When discussing the European elections a starting point is given by the categorization proposed by Reif and Schmitt (1980). The use of the term *second-order elections* borrows from the previous assumptions that there are first-level elections – mostly represented by national parliamentary or presidential elections, depending on the system – and elections that are somewhat in the shadow of these, like municipal or local elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Nevertheless, the authors of this proposal do not claim that the EP elections are specific second-order elections, but they seem to have similar characteristics derived from the ‘less-at-stake dimension’ (Reif and Schmitt, 1980: 9). Recently, Skrinis and Teperoglou (2008) did find significant dissimilarities between local level elections and European Parliamentary elections, but both are influenced by the national elections. Although the distance between the decision-makers and the electorate remains an essential point in the

argumentation for the persistence of the second-order categorization, the institutional developments of the EU – the Parliament gaining more power – and the emergence of a European identity can reduce these discrepancies (Hajner, 2001). However, using the 2004 EP election data Schmitt (2005) and Rohrschneider and Clark (2008) find consistent empirical evidence for the validity of this categorization. Even though there are vague signs that EU-level issues determine the vote in the EP elections as well (Rohrschneider and Clark, 2008), the ‘transfer-hypothesis’<sup>1</sup> remains powerful. Furthermore, this macro-level theory was also extended to develop an individual level theory of voting in second-order elections (Hobolt and Wittrock, 2011), finding more sincere voting in the EP elections compared to the national elections.

Frequently, discussions about the EP elections and turnout lead to the problems of European identity, the European political community, and remotely to the issue of the EU’s democratic deficit. These considerations are important when trying to evaluate how the EP elections (and their salience) are considered and what kind of ‘pressures’ can appear, determining the ‘intentional overreporting’ stemming from social desirability. As expected, parallel with the extension of the EU from a purely economic cooperation to a political one, there is an observable ongoing process of European identity and political community formation that depends also on the length of the EU membership (Scheuer, 1999; Scheuer and Schmitt, 2007). Moreover, when discussing the low turnout in the EP elections, Schmitt (2005) asserts that it is not caused merely by euroskepticism. Similarly, an objectively poor performance of the anti-EU parties in the 2004 EP elections can be observed (Adshead and Hill, 2005). Political community, European identity and the participation in the EP elections, however, are of paramount importance for ‘input-oriented legitimacy’ (Thomassen and Schmitt, 2004). A supranational perspective inevitably generates more normative assertions about the effects of the democratic deficit (Follesdal and Hix, 2005). From the perspective of the present analysis, the statements on how the electorate does not have the power (or mechanisms) to influence political outputs with their expressed preferences are worth noting (Follesdal and Hix, 2005). This can be considered a derivate of the second-order classification, but it yields a more comprehensive institutional and conceptual framework for the ‘less-at-stake dimension’. Returning to the specific second-order categorization, one of the characteristics derived from the ‘less-at-stake dimension’ is the lower turnout that can be

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<sup>1</sup> The transfer hypothesis posits that voters tend to use (or transfer) their evaluations of national-level phenomena to the EU-level when voting in EU elections (Rohrschneider and Clark, 2008).

observed in the EP elections as well (Adshead and Hill, 2005; Auers, 2005). The very low turnout in the new member states in the 2004 EP elections must be analyzed carefully, because as Schmitt (2005) states, one of the main determinants was that in these countries there are no clear and consolidated party affiliations. Sustaining this conclusion from a different perspective, Kostadinova (2003) draws attention to the specific transitional influences in the post-communist countries. Franklin (2007) acknowledges that the determinants of turnout in the new member states are very similar to those in the old member states, but a learning process – perhaps similar to the behavioral voting (Plutzer, 2005) – needs to take place in the new member states. When it comes to the factors that influence turnout, there is a quasi-unanimous position; but the implications of lower turnout are subject to debates related to representativeness (Lijphart, 1997; Rosema, 2007). In case of the EP elections, the low turnout can be viewed as an indicator for more extensive and general phenomena – the success or approval of the European project - and thus the level of turnout becomes even more important.

Considering that there is an ongoing institutional development in the EU, specific European issues amend these classic determinants of turnout. The effect of the European issues is incorporated and enhanced by the formation of a European identity. Based on these premises, van der Eijk et al (1996) suggest that the second-order categorization should be refined, focusing much more clearly only on the ‘what is at stake’ question. In this sense, even if the European Parliament gains power and European parties form better platforms, the high distance between the European issues and citizens is amplified by the distant policy outcomes and decision-making procedures. Since the European level issue positions or cognitive heuristics are not yet fully developed, when a rational choice perspective is adopted, the perceived benefits are significantly lower (at equal costs) in the European elections than in the national elections, sustaining the position of ‘why bother’ with the EP vote (Mattila, 2003).

### ***Misreporting in Post-Election Surveys***

Previous research in misreporting yields sufficient input for evaluating the possible determinants of overreporting and how they can be applied for second-order elections as well. As Belli et al (2001: 493) note, “overreporting of voting is a complex phenomenon that includes attitudinal, social, and cognitive dimensions”. In the study of overreporting two levels of analysis are possible: the individual assessment and the aggregate analysis. Even if the individual level analysis yields better understanding of the phenomenon because

overreporting can be linked to the individual motivational bases of political participation (Silver et al, 1986), this method requires the availability of vote validation. Since neither EES nor CSES<sup>2</sup> has this data, and the aggregate level of analysis is also accepted as valid when studying overreporting (Belli et al, 2006), the present analysis uses country-level aggregate data. The second general conclusion of these studies shows that misreporting is almost always overreporting (Belli et al, 2006; Bernstein et al, 2001; Silver et al, 1986), so the underreporting - saying that one did not vote even when in reality she voted - should not be considered. Simultaneously, research finds that people who face more pressure (high education level, partisanship, contacted by parties to vote) and see value in the political process have a higher probability to overreport turnout (Belli et al, 2001; Bernstein et al, 2001). These findings are nuanced when the distance in days between election and interview is considered. In a comparative manner, Karp and Brockington (2005), include in their analysis ‘second-order’ elections in different countries – House elections in the US, local elections in Sweden – finding lower levels of overreporting. This could be linked also to the positive relationship between the turnout and overreporting, since the more important the elections were (inducing a higher turnout) the social desirability effects increase (Karp and Brockington, 2005). Corroborating these findings with the previous assertions about similarities in individual characteristics of voters in national and EP elections, one may conclude that the actual differences in overreporting are overwhelmingly conditioned by the perception about the elections (derived also from the first or second-order status).

Overall, the social desirability theory, as a determinant of overreporting, refers to an intentional misreporting of the individual with the scope of maintaining a positive self-image (Belli et al, 2006). Memory failure is the other determinant of overreporting that does not imply motivated intentionality<sup>3</sup>, and the theory states that overreporting can be caused by actually not remembering the act of voting<sup>4</sup>. Several question wording variations were proposed to limit both determinants<sup>5</sup>, reducing overreporting in an experimental setting (Belli et al, 1999; Belli et al, 2006; Duff et al, 2007). The EES and CSES vote questions are not

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<sup>2</sup> For the Swedish National Election Studies and the New Zealand National Election Studies there is a validation process.

<sup>3</sup> In some cases it is described as ‘motivated misremembering’ (Belli et al, 2001), but it does not directly reflect on the intentionality.

<sup>4</sup> The memory failure hypothesis is supported and validated by the careful analysis of how the longer period between the elections and interview reduces the overreporting (using validated vote question or estimated overreporting as well).

<sup>5</sup> For example, face-saving and source monitoring (Belli et al, 2001; Belli et al, 2006).

significantly different in wording (both having face-saving and none of them operating with memory clues).

Considering the characteristics of the EP elections as second-order elections and the importance of social desirability in overreporting, we turn now to our hypotheses. As argued above, overreporting in EP election surveys must be considered in relative terms, using as baseline the overreporting in most proximate national election surveys. This enables us to investigate the effects of second-order nature of the EP elections, but also accounting for the cross-country differences in political participation. Misreporting is always calculated as a difference between the election survey-based estimation of turnout and the official turnout for each election type and country in part. A positive difference reflects overreporting, whereas a negative difference would reflect underreporting. To keep the relative terms in measuring overreporting, we then focus on how these misreporting numbers differ for national and European election surveys. The difference in overreporting, calculated by subtracting the EP overreporting from the national election survey overreporting, reflects the *election effect on overreporting* (henceforth *EEO*). A positive value for the EEO indicates that there is more overreporting in the national election surveys than in the EP election surveys. Conversely, a negative value of EEO suggests more overreporting in the EP election surveys when the baseline is the overreporting in the national election surveys.

When controlling for memory failure, we hypothesize *increased social desirability effects in the EEO between the 2004 EP elections and the proximate national elections (1)*. A generally high overreporting in the national elections and low overreporting in the EP elections would suggest increased difference between them: high EEO. Nevertheless, as the difference itself does not provide enough evidence for linking the EP elections' to the lower salience or to a different level of 'pressure' when responding to the vote questions, we will test for both possible determinants of overreporting. Secondly, the different stage in European identity and political community formation (length of EU membership) generates significant differences between new and old member states, expecting a smaller magnitude *EEO in the old-members states (2)*. Consequently, we are both interested in the direction of EEO (Hypothesis 1), and the variation in the magnitude of this effect (Hypothesis 2). The next section presents how the custom country-level aggregate dataset was built, offers preliminary subgroup mean comparisons, and winds up with specifying and running the two regression models.



## Data

The present analysis relies on the data extracted from the 2004 European Election Studies (EES) and the Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems Module II (CSES) datasets<sup>6</sup>. In order to conduct the aggregate level analysis, a custom dataset was created. Considering the year of analysis (2004), the maximum potential sample size on the country level would have been 25, but CSES Module II did not contain survey data for all EU countries and thus data availability and compatibility constraints led to a decreased sample size of 15<sup>7</sup>. The final dataset contains 10 ‘old’ EU member states and 5 countries that joined the EU in 2004 (new member states).

For each country, the official turnout in the national elections and European Elections was included, based on the turnouts officially registered<sup>8</sup>, and the data was checked with the data and tables presented by Adshead and Hill (2005) and Auers (2005). A survey based estimated turnout was calculated for both EP elections and national elections. These country level variables reflect the frequency of ‘yes’ answers for the turnout questions in the 2004 EES and CSES Module II. The estimated turnouts reflect the self-reported voter turnout. Since neither the EES nor the CSES has vote validation that would grant the possibility to analyze misreporting on an individual level, the difference between the estimated turnout (for EP elections and national elections separately) and official turnout remains the best possible proxy in evaluating misreporting. Consequently, misreporting in the EP elections was calculated as a difference between the survey-based estimated turnout and the official turnout; misreporting in national elections was calculated using the same method (Estimated turnout – Official turnout). The EEO is the difference between the national election survey misreporting in a given country, and the EP election survey misreporting in the same country. This approach and method of calculation was possible due to three fundamental characteristics of the data. Firstly, although there are differences in sample sizes and sampling methods between EES and CSES, both of them have representative national samples. Secondly, the methods of official turnout calculations are the same<sup>9</sup>. Thirdly, there are no significant differences in the turnout question wording<sup>10</sup>. These three characteristics of the data<sup>11</sup> ensure that there are no

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<sup>6</sup> Where two-round elections were held, only the first round was taken into consideration for this analysis.

<sup>7</sup> Complete country list for the final analysis: Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

<sup>8</sup> The EP Election results were downloaded from the 2004 Election official website. The national election turnout data was extracted from the CSES Module II integrated dataset, which had a variable that contained the officially reported turnout.

<sup>9</sup> The method of turnout calculation is number of votes over the eligible voting population.

<sup>10</sup> The EES Questionnaire has an explicit face-saving formulation, whereas some country questionnaires from CSES work with the direct ‘did or did not vote’ question, having only an introductory part stating when the

artificial dissimilarities generated by underlying design and methods and thus the comparisons are valid. We report the country specific values for official turnout, misreporting and EEO in Table 1. With the exception of the national election survey in Italy (underreporting of turnout, 7%), all countries independent of the type of election display overreporting. Surprisingly however, there is much higher overreporting after the EP elections than after national elections. Considering our theoretical framework based on the second order election theory, these numbers are unexpected, but their face values should not be overestimated. In the next sections, we will try to explain this pattern and see whether our theory still holds.

As a second major component of the dataset, distances in days between the election and the interview are calculated. Thus, we calculate the elapsed time from election to the interview (henceforth ETEI) in units of days. These calculations follow the same logic as presented above, yielding country-level average ETEI for both EP elections and national elections. Calendar operations were carried out for each country in order to get the ETEI for each administered questionnaire, and from this data country-level averages were calculated. Having these data for both elections, the difference ETEI across elections is shown by subtracting the country-level ETEI for EP elections from the country-level ETEI for national elections. Similarly to the case of difference in EEO, no absolute values were used, keeping the signs of the differences (positive or negative) in order to have information about the direction of the differences.

Since the 2004 EES does not provide interview dates<sup>12</sup> for six countries of the sample, one option would have been using mean imputation to tackle the missing data problem. However, this method has inherent risks when estimating the missing values and the single possible method would have been arithmetic mean imputation, because of the fact that the relationship between the two differences is one of our main concerns in the analysis. In order to avoid the possible biases generated by the arithmetic mean imputation, we used maximum likelihood estimation for the missing values, and the models were run in Mplus.

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elections were. This could bias the overreporting results for the EES (down), but the aggregation used in this analysis reduces the effect of this bias.

<sup>11</sup> Neither of the surveys contains underage respondents.

<sup>12</sup> The separate country level datasets (from EES) were checked as well to get the necessary data.

**Table 1** Turnout and overreporting, CSES II and EES 2004

Country	EP Turnout	National Election Turnout	EES Misreporting	NES Misreporting	Election effect on overreporting (EEO)
Czech Republic	28.32	58	22.08	15.3	-6.78
Denmark	47.9	87.1	16.6	7.5	-9.1
Finland	41.1	69.7	23.3	10.3	-13
France	42.76	71.61	17.24	7.49	-9.75
Germany	43	79.1	18.8	14.8	-4
Hungary	38.5	70.53	13.7	12.17	-1.53
Ireland	59.7	62.57	23	22.73	-0.27
Italy	73.1	83.6	18.3	-7	-25.3
Netherlands	39.3	79.1	27.7	17.7	-10
Poland	20.87	46.29	12.73	11.41	-1.32
Portugal	38.6	64.26	26.3	14.54	-11.76
Slovenia	28.3	60.65	9.6	14.95	5.35
Spain	45.1	75.66	18.3	13.24	-5.06
Sweden	37.8	80.11	6.2	8.29	2.09
UK	38.9	61.3	18.6	10.8	-7.8

For the regression analysis, two auxiliary variables were created to reflect on some theoretical expectations and to ensure the comprehensiveness of the analysis. We used a dummy variable for differentiating between new and old member states (1 = new member state [accession year 2004], 0 = old member state), and a dummy variable for the case of Italy (1 = if Italy, 0 = if other), because it manifested itself as an outlier in the national elections misreporting. Based on the CSES dataset, Italy is the only country where there was a negative misreporting in the national elections held on the 4 October 2006. Since the theoretical background suggests that this case is very unlikely, several domestic political influences can account for this result (misreporting of -7%), and none of the other states show this tendency, it can be considered an outlier. In order to control for this, we do not drop the case, but we introduce a dummy variable for Italy. This variable is only a control variable, and thus it will not be interpreted<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Since it is not meaningful to employ control variables in Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), the case of Italy was dropped from the analysis, generating a final sample size of 14.

The last consideration<sup>14</sup> regards the respondents' attitudes towards the European Union that can determine EEO. Although some of the effects of these variables are already present in the turnout results, it is a theoretically sound requirement to put these attitude variables in the EEO analysis as well. The major limitation in using this data is caused by the fact that this is a country-level analysis. As there is no vote validation, averages for countries must be calculated for the attitude variables as well. When aggregating the 4-scale attitude variables from the 2004 EES, the variances will be very small<sup>15</sup> and thus putting them into the regression models would not lead to any significant contribution. Furthermore, it is an additional parameter to be estimated on a very small sample size. However, these attitudinal variables can be used in the QCA, conferring a complementary character to this analysis<sup>16</sup>.

## Analysis and results

### *Linear Regressions*

In order to test the proposed hypotheses we specify two distinct regression models:

$$EEO = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{NewMember} + \beta_2 \text{ETEI}_{\text{Difference}} + \beta_3 \text{EUTurnout} + \beta_4 \text{Italy} + e$$

$$EEO = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{NewMember} + \beta_2 \text{ETEI}_{\text{EES}} + \beta_3 \text{ETEI}_{\text{CSES}} + \beta_4 \text{EUTurnout} + \beta_5 \text{Italy} + e$$

We include in both models the official turnout in the EP elections in order to control for the 'ceiling effect'<sup>17</sup>. Since preliminary analysis show that there is a statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) high and positive correlation ( $r=0.609$ ) between the official turnout in the EP elections and national elections, including only one official turnout as a control is sufficient and it helps ensuring the parsimony of the models.

The main difference between the two models lies in the usage of the ETEI. The first model checks whether the actual difference between  $\text{ETEI}_{\text{CSES}}$  and  $\text{ETEI}_{\text{EES}}$  influences the observed election effect on overreporting (EEO). The second model takes into consideration

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<sup>14</sup> Variables for party or electoral system are not included in the present analysis, because they have an influence only on the turnout in elections, not on the motivations or manifestation of overreporting (or the difference between overreporting).

<sup>15</sup> For example, variance for the country-level aggregated variable that reflects whether the 'respondent' is proud of being an EU citizen is .094 [best possible proxy variable for the attitude].

<sup>16</sup> A detailed description of the coding will be presented in the QCA section.

<sup>17</sup> The ceiling effect refers to situations when the turnout is very high. In situations like these, the possibility to register overreporting (on an aggregate level) is much reduced. If everybody voted, there is no overreporting. In other words, the closer the official turnout gets to the maximum possible turnout rate (100%), the lower the overreporting will be.

the assertions of the memory failure theory, putting into the equation the  $ETEI_{CSES}$  and  $ETEI_{EES}$  separately.

Consequently, Model 2 tests whether memory failure affects overreporting in the two different election surveys. The theoretical expectations derived from the assumptions that EP elections are second-order elections and thus the pressure that defines social desirability is lower, imply that although memory failure theory may load on the separate overreportings, the difference between them will not be a determinant of the EEO.

Table 2 presents the results of the simple linear regression for both Model 1 and Model 2, reporting the unstandardized regression coefficients for each independent variable (standard errors in parenthesis). As the results clearly show, Model 2 significantly outperformed Model 1, showing support for the hypothesis that EEO is indeed determined by differences in perception about the two elections analyzed here. To point out how exactly this conclusion can be formulated, the detailed interpretation of the results is needed. First, the explained variance and model-fit measure suggest a better explanatory power for Model 2 (adjusted R-squared of 0.846 compared to 0.553 for Model 1).

The new member state variable in Model 1 reaches borderline statistical significance ( $p = 0.052$ ), and considering the small sample size it should be discussed. The positive sign shows that being a new Member State determines a smaller EEO. Everything else held constant, the predicted average EEO in new members states is around -0.8%, whereas in old member states this is -6.6% percent. Given the coding, we see that in new member states the overreporting patterns go hand in hand, whereas there is much bigger overreporting in EES – compared to national election surveys – for old member states.

**Table 2** Unstandardized regression coefficients for Model 1 and Model 2

	<b>MODEL 1</b>	<b>MODEL 2</b>
<i>Intercept</i>	-6.660 (11.88)	-15.770** (6.76)
<i>New Member State</i>	5.833* (2.99)	8.989*** (2.25)
<i>Official Turnout in EP elections</i>	-0.046 (0.26)	-0.016 (0.15)
<i>Difference in distance of days</i>	0.036 (0.03)	-
<i>Average distance of days EES (EU)</i>	-	0.347*** (0.06)
<i>Average distance of days CSES (NE)</i>	-	0.067*** (0.01)
<i>Model-fit (adjusted <math>R^2</math>) and F-test significance level</i>	0.553; $p < 0.05$	0.846; $p < 0.001$
<i>N</i>	15	15

\* denotes  $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* denotes  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* denotes  $p < 0.01$ . Standard errors in parentheses.

This finding is rather puzzling, since one would expect more similar patterns for old member states because of higher degree of Europeanization. Looking at the data (and Table 1) we also see that in the case of new member states there are no striking high-high or low-low overreporting combinations, most of these states displaying a close to the average level of overreporting. Consequently, based on Model 1 we do not find empirical confirmation of our second hypothesis.

Furthermore, the results of Model 1 show that the difference in overreporting (EEO) cannot be linked directly to the ETEI differential. In other words, although there are differences in the time elapsed between election and interview for the two surveys (EES and CSES) these do not account for the variance in overreporting patterns. In case there is a relationship between the two, our regression model failed to make it apparent.

Turning now to Model 2, we find again that in new member states the overreporting patterns are more aligned than in old member states. The magnitude of this effect is substantial, indicating an almost 9 percent lower difference for new member states. Furthermore, both memory failure indicators (for EES and CSES) reach statistical significance as independent variables, but surprisingly they have the same signs. Even if the coefficient for the ETEI in the national election surveys (CSES) is small (0.067) compared to the one found for the EES, in order to fully understand the results, one should consider longer periods (not one day, as the operationalization suggests). For example, an approximately one month delay between the EP elections and the administration of the EES interview means an over 10 percent drop in the negative EEO. The same delay for the national election survey decreases the election effect only with around 2 percent.

We can interpret these results following the simple rule that ETEI for a given survey has effect only on the overreporting observed in that survey. According to the memory failure theory, it is expected that an increase in ETEI for national elections would lead to an increase in the overreporting for national election studies, and have no impact on the overreporting in EES. Again, as in almost all of the cases EES overreporting is higher than the one in the national election survey, the EEO is predominantly negative. Our results confirm this scenario, because the alignment between the two overreportings increases together with the distance in days for national elections. As expected theoretically, this is due to the fact that the national election survey overreporting increases, yielding smaller differences between national and EES overreporting.

The EES average distance in days was expected to trigger higher overreporting in EES and accordingly serve as a determinant for bigger EEO. Based on Model 2 we have to discard this hypothesis. The substantive positive effect suggests that while ETEI for EES increases, overreporting in EES will decrease. This suggests that the memory failure hypothesis works differently for first and second-order election studies. In the case of the national elections, we have lower overreporting if the questionnaire is implemented close after the election and the overreporting increases with the delay. In the case of European elections, there is high overreporting right after the election, but much lower as we get farther from the election.

Corroborating the results from these models, we can conclude that even if the ETEI affects directly the overreportings in the distinct elections (and this is partially transposed into the effects on EEO), the main difference in overreporting between national and EP elections is not given by the relationship of these two measures. Linking these results to the theoretical framework that suggested that the ‘battle’ is between social desirability and memory failure, one can argue that these results bring support for the social desirability theory. And this is rightfully puzzling, because we have overwhelmingly negative EEO (with a mean of -6.54 for this sample) showing that people tend to overreport more in the EES than in the national ones, and this is not an outcome of differences in when the surveys were implemented.

Based our regression results the possible explanation lies partially in the effect of memory failure. If the effect of memory failure would be as expected (low to high overreporting) in EES we would find, on average, lower overreporting in the EES. The “misbehavior” of this determinant is than partially responsible for finding the negative EEO. There are still two problems with this scenario. First, we cannot isolate this effect from the social desirability effect, and it still does not offer an explanation why people right after the European elections massively overreport turnout. Secondly, we do not have a theoretically grounded explanation why the memory failure acts differently in the second order election analyzed, rendering this part of the analysis somewhat inconclusive. In order to get a better understanding of these findings, the following subsection employs Qualitative Comparative Analysis, using the attitudinal variables that reflect the perceptions about the EU.

### ***Qualitative Comparative Analysis***

There are important reasons for considering a further analysis of the data. Firstly, some of the results found in the two regression models are rather peculiar and need further investigation. The ETEI differential was not found to be a significant predictor of the difference of

overreporting (EEO) but the separate ETEIs – for national elections and EU elections respectively – both seem to influence the difference in overreporting in the same way. Secondly, the virtual lack of variance on the attitudinal variables mentioned previously, together with the small number of cases in the sample, motivated us to use certain proxies for European identity instead of simply using these variables. While the inclusion of the length of EU membership variable (see “New Member State” in Table 2) was found to be fairly promising, it is, nevertheless, only a proxy for European identity. Based on the findings of previous research (Scheuer, 1999), an increase in the membership length leads to more developed European identity, and thus the membership length can be considered a fairly good proxy for this concept, but using direct attitudinal variables may be preferred. Finally, in order to address some of the possible critiques regarding the use of regression models on such a small number of observations, a qualitative approach, complementary to the previous quantitative study, would be very appropriate.

In order to bring new evidence in support of the findings of the previous models but also to discover patterns that are not apparent with statistical tools, we used two separate QCA (Qualitative Comparative Analysis) models. QCA is a method developed by Charles Ragin (Ragin, 1987; 2000; 2008) in order to enhance the systematic study of small or medium numbers of cases, where statistical methods do not perform particularly well and performing case studies would be painstaking and ineffective. Since the method is used here only as an “analytical technique” and not as a research method *per se* (Schneider and Wagemann, 2010), we will concentrate in the following paragraphs on explaining the technical aspects of QCA rather than the epistemological ones. Consequently, instead of rethinking our research design for the purposes of the qualitative analysis, the QCA will be performed on the statistical framework discussed in the first part of the article and it will only be employed as an analytical tool.

Unlike regression based models, QCA models aim at finding configurational patterns rather than cumulative effects. In statistical terms, each independent variable in a regression model explains a part of the residual variance in the dependent variable (as long as the independent variable is linearly associated with the residuals). QCA, however, searches for configurations of factors – conditions – that are sufficient and/or necessary for the occurrence of an outcome. The conditions do not contribute positively or negatively to an increase or decrease in the value of a dependent variable; their contribution to the occurrence of the



outcome does not add up but it is rather the co-incidence of conditions that leads to the outcome (Ragin, 1987).

The conditions in QCA should be seen as depicting the set-membership of the cases. In crisp-set QCA, the conditions can take either the value of 1 (the condition is present for a certain case) or 0 (the case does not display the characteristic). In fuzzy-set QCA, which is used in this article, the values that are attributed to each case show the degree of membership to the 1-set. This means that the values are in the 0-1 range, where 0.5 refers to the ambiguous situation where that particular case is no more in the 1 category than it is in the 0 category.

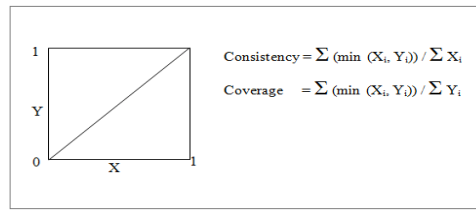
QCA works with Boolean algebra, set-theory and logical operators. Thus, when we say that X is a sufficient condition for Y it means that the Y set includes the entire X set; when this happens, X has a consistency of 1 as a sufficient condition for Y and has a coverage between 0 and 1 that shows the percentage of cases that display X out of the cases that display both X and Y (for graphical representation see Table 3 below). X is a fully consistent necessary condition for Y when the X set includes the entire Y set; the coverage of such a condition will represent the percentage of cases that display Y out of the entire X set. Therefore, X sufficient for Y is a fully consistent solution if there are no cases in cell C below – the occurrence of X entails the occurrence of Y. Similarly, X necessary for Y is a fully consistent solution if there are no cases in cell A – the occurrence of Y entails the occurrence of X.

With fuzzy-set QCA the logic is almost identical to that of the crisp set analysis. If we look at the table above as being a two dimensional chart instead of a 2x2 table, with the outcome on the Y scale and the condition on the X scale, X sufficient for Y will be a fully consistent solution when there are no cases below the diagonal (see explanatory Figure 1 below).

**Table 3** Graphical representation

Outcome (Y)	Condition (X)		
		0	1
	1	A	B
	0	D	C

**Figure 1**



Source: Ragin, 2006.

There are several reasons why we considered the fuzzy-set type of QCA as being more appropriate than crisp-set for the purposes of our analysis. Most importantly, our causal conditions are not proper measures of set-membership – for instance, there is no logical maximum to the distance in days between the date of the elections and the date when the survey data was collected (ETEI) – which makes it very counterintuitive to classify our cases as “full members” and “not members”. While the meaning of the fuzzy conditions does not differ significantly from that of the crisp-set ones, the former offer a wider range of opportunities for analyses that cannot be designed to match the qualitative logic of QCA. The scores assigned to our cases in the qualitative analysis will be interpreted as closeness to the characteristics of the case that displays the most similarities to a “full member”. Thus, a score of 0.9 on ETEI<sub>CSES</sub> will belong to a case that is very similar to Slovenia from this particular point of view – the survey data was collected very long after the elections took place. Slovenia will be considered, therefore, a full member of the “high ETEI” set by virtue of the fact that the CSES data was collected farthest away from their national elections. The other conditions were calibrated following the same logic.

Table 4 contains the raw data of the fuzzy-set analysis with the conditions calibrated around the median of the variables they are based on, and their truncated minimum and maximum as anchors at the extremities. The last two conditions, “euproud” and “interest” are the two attitudinal variables mentioned previously. “euproud” is based on the questionnaire item referring to how proud the respondent feels of being European and “interest” refers to how interested the respondents were in the European Parliamentary elections. Both conditions are coded inversely, which means that high values correspond to low degrees of European pride and interest. Furthermore, due to the peculiarities presented in previous sections of this study, Italy was excluded from the data and the analysis was performed on the remaining 14 countries. While in the regression models we had to use the length of EU membership as proxy for attitudinal variables, this proxy is no longer needed in the qualitative analysis since

multicollinearity and lack of variance do not affect the results of a QCA. Moreover, the turnout variable that we used to control for ceiling effects but did not yield any significant result was eliminated from the qualitative analysis, thus keeping the number of logical remainders<sup>18</sup> relatively small. By doing this we avoided making assumptions regarding the outcome of logical configurations that were not empirically observed.

In line with our theory, we would expect to find that high levels of European pride and interest in European affairs will attenuate the effect of the second order character of the EP elections on overreporting. Thus, we expect the overreporting of EP turnout to be higher in countries with higher levels of pride and/or interest. Regarding the conditions related to time ( $ETEI_{CSES}$ ,  $ETEI_{EES}$  and  $ETEI_{CSES}-ETEI_{EES}$ ) the situation is not as straightforward. If we assume that the effect of social desirability on overreporting is not a function of time, low  $ETEI_{CSES}-ETEI_{EES}$  together with high levels of pride and/or interest should produce the largest differences in overreporting (EEO)<sup>19</sup>. However, if social desirability varies with time, we can even expect the reverse, depending on the interplay between the two main factors (memory and social desirability) that are known to influence overreporting. If time influences the two in the same direction, the expectations mentioned previously will be augmented by the presence of the two factors; if time has opposite effects on the two, they can cancel each other out (which would mean that the  $ETEI_{CSES}-ETEI_{EES}$  condition will not appear in the solution) or we can even find that social desirability overturns the effect of memory failure (in this case big scores on  $ETEI_{CSES}-ETEI_{EES}$  will display the highest EEO).

We ran the QCA with low EEO as outcome and interest, and pride and  $ETEI_{CSES}-ETEI_{EES}$  as causal conditions (see Model 3 below). In the second model, instead of the latter we introduced  $ETEI_{CSES}$  and  $ETEI_{EES}$  separately, as we did for the second regression model (see Model 4 below). We used, therefore, conditions based on variables that had a peculiar behavior in the two regression models and replaced the new/old member proxy with the actual European identity indicators.

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<sup>18</sup> A logical remainder is a configuration of conditions that was not empirically observed but is (at least mathematically) plausible. For instance, whenever we have three conditions there are 8 configurations that are mathematically plausible: ABC, ABc, AbC, Abc, aBC, aBc, abC, abc – the more conditions we have, the more logical remainders there are (Ragin 1987; Ragin 2006).

<sup>19</sup> The difference in overreporting is the overreporting in CSES subtracted from the overreporting in EES; large differences in overreporting are to be found when the overreporting of national election turnout is minimal and the overreporting to EP elections is maximized.

**Table 3** Raw data for Model 3 and Model 4

Country	EEO	ETEI <sub>EES</sub>	ETEI <sub>CSES</sub>	$\Delta_{ETEI}$	euproud	interest
Czech Republic	0.71	0.38	0.27	0.47	0.98	0.94
Denmark	0.89	0.88	0.52	0.06	0.41	0.39
Finland	0.98		0.06		0.95	0.38
France	0.91		0.65		0.09	0.94
Germany	0.35	0.62	0.74	0.74	0.5	0.53
Hungary	0.11	0.14	0.18	0.51	0.41	0.72
Ireland	0.06		0.77		0.05	0.07
Netherlands	0.92	0.4	0.46	0.53	0.98	0.95
Poland	0.1		0.33		0.59	0.53
Portugal	0.97		0.91		0.04	0.29
Slovenia	0	0.04	1	1	0.5	0.41
Spain	0.51	0.8	0.09	0.01	0.09	0.89
Sweden	0.01	0.97	0.56	0.01	0.9	
UK	0.8	0.09	0.93	0.96	0.98	0.49

The results for the first model show that the low difference in overreporting appears either when there are high levels of interest for European issues and the national elections occurred much farther in time from the date of the interviews than the European elections did – consistency = 0.847 – or when there are high levels of European pride and the difference in days is big – consistency = 1. These results seem to bring some support for the memory failure hypothesis.

Model 3:	Solution:
$eeo = f(\text{INTEREST}, \text{PRIDE}, \text{ETEI}_{\text{CSES}} - \text{ETEI}_{\text{EES}})^{20}$	$\text{interest} * (\text{ETEI}_{\text{CSES}} - \text{ETEI}_{\text{EES}}) + \text{pride} * (\text{ETEI}_{\text{CSES}} - \text{ETEI}_{\text{EES}})^{21}$
Model 4:	Solution:
$eeo = f(\text{INTEREST}, \text{PRIDE}, \text{ETEI}_{\text{CSES}}, \text{ETEI}_{\text{EES}})$	$\text{pride} * \text{ETEI}_{\text{EES}} + \text{ETEI}_{\text{EES}} * \text{interest}$

The memory failure theory states that overreporting is bound to increase in time due to the fact that people have a tendency to forget whether they voted or not. Since overreporting in EP elections is higher than the overreporting for national elections (with the exceptions mentioned in the previous section of this study), the overreporting difference should decrease as  $\text{ETEI}_{\text{CSES}} - \text{ETEI}_{\text{EES}}$  increases. In qualitative terms, if we take the memory failure theory for granted, we would expect to see the smallest gap in overreporting when the CSES data

<sup>20</sup> The lowercase marks a low level of membership to a certain set; the uppercase marks a high level of membership.

<sup>21</sup> “\*” stands for logical “AND”; “+” stands for logical “OR”.

collection occurred much farther away from the national elections than the EES one from the European elections<sup>22</sup> (when the  $ETEI_{CSES} - ETEI_{EES}$  condition is closest to 0: no set-membership). The results, however, show a fairly different picture.

A plausible explanation for this would be that the overreporting caused by social desirability reaches a climax immediately after elections due to the media campaigns and the social pressures that citizens are subject to. As time passes, the social desirability that causes overreporting may decrease at different rates for different types of elections; causing the overreporting of turnout to vary with time in different ways for separate elections. While the overreporting in European elections is overall higher than the one in national elections, there are factors that seem to close the gap between the two. Immediately after the EP elections, countries that have either high levels of European pride or higher averages for “interest in EP elections” will display rates of overreporting for EP elections that are as low as the ones for national elections. While these results do not rule out social desirability effects, they certainly show that the effects of the mechanics of social desirability are dwarfed by those of the memory related factors.

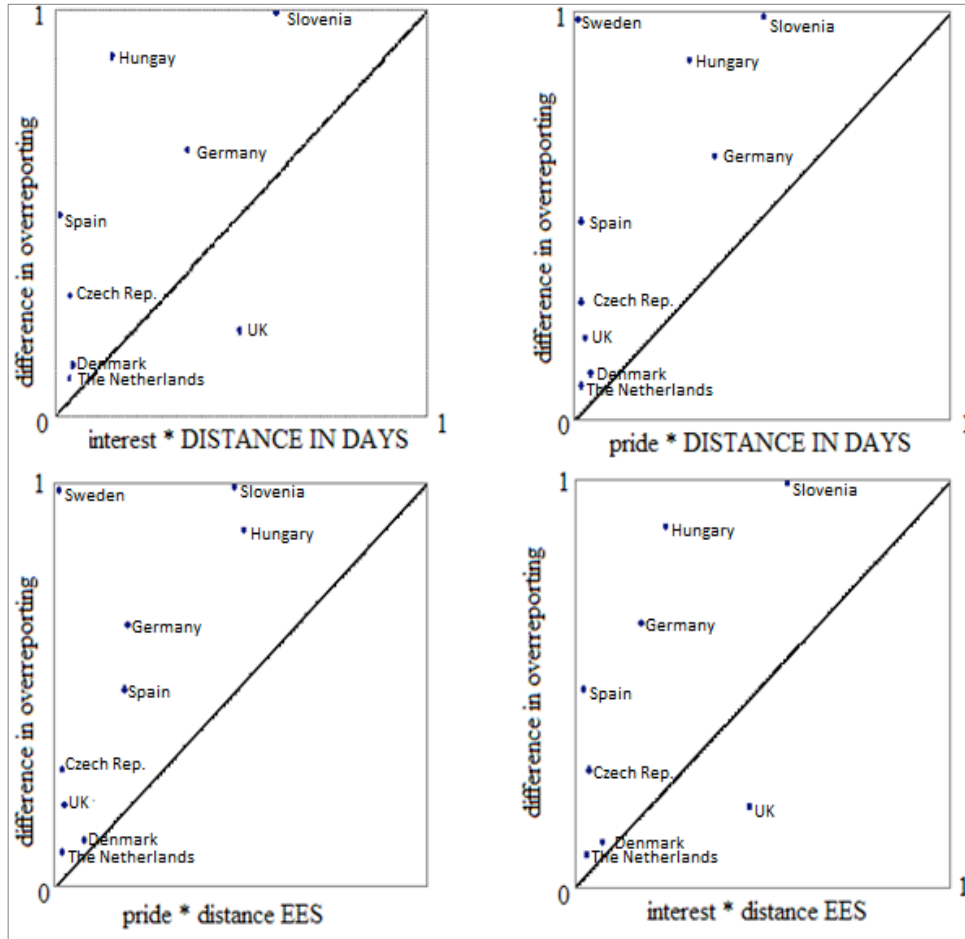
It is important to notice, however, that the conditions related to European identity seem to be indispensable for having a low difference in overreporting between the European and the national elections. These results would be highly consistent with a social desirability hypothesis of an opposite directionality: it looks as if European pride and interest in EP elections are actually driving overreporting down in the EES database. However, if a relatively lower level of misreporting is commonplace for national elections, EU pride and interest in EP elections are likely to decrease the overreporting of turnout to EP elections, thus making national and European elections more similar with regard to this phenomenon. Our initial theoretical expectations informed by our understanding of the second order election theory and misinformed by our expectation of higher levels of overreporting for EP elections, were therefore not entirely inaccurate. European pride does seem to foster greater similarities in misreporting behavior between national and European elections, and so does the interest in EP elections. However, these effects only occur when the questionnaire is administered soon after the elections took place, when we expect no memory failure effects but strong social desirability ones. We can conclude, thus, that social desirability does not play a role as important and unequivocal as the role played by memory failure in our studied setting.

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<sup>22</sup> Note that the conditions are calibrated, all values are in the 0-1 range and centered around the median

All the results presented previously are graphically represented in the diagrams below. The plots on the first line correspond to the solution terms for Model 3; below them the solution terms for Model 2 can be seen. As readily observable in the plots presented in Figure 2, the European identity indicators are the most important explanatory factors of the differences in overreporting between EP elections and national elections.

**Figure 2** X-Y plots representing the solutions for Model 3 and Model 4



*Note:* DISTANCE IN DAYS =  $E_{TEI_{CSSES}} - E_{TEI_{EES}}$ , distance EES =  $E_{TEI_{EES}}$ , difference in overreporting = EEO.

## Discussion

Throughout this paper we analyzed the overreporting differences between the EES and CSSES on a custom-built country-level database, containing 15 EU Member States. The main motivation behind analyzing these differences lies in the fact that if the overreporting differences are determined by social desirability differences, not by differences in time elapsed between the elections and the survey administration date, the results can be considered good proxies for the different pressures that lead the self-motivated misreporting .

Implicitly, this yields indications on how the EP elections are perceived by citizens. If the theory of the ‘second-order elections’ is still valid and manifests itself, overreporting in the EES 2004 should be lower than it is in the case of national elections, because it is less ‘socially attractive’ to declare that one voted than in national elections. But the data suggested a different pattern. Since the second-order election categorization and the ‘less-at-stake’ dimension could mean that the EP elections are perceived as being less important and thus easier to ‘forget’, the determinants of the overreporting difference were studied. We argued that the analysis of overreporting should take into consideration several confounders, such as turnout differences or different time points for interviewing.

Two regression models provided support for the assertion that differences in overreporting – dubbed as election effect on overreporting (EEO) - are determined by the different level of pressures perceived when answering vote questions. Memory failure accounts for some variation in each post-election survey, but the difference in the elapsed time between election and interviews for EES and CSES is not a significant determinant of the election effect. Controlling for this aspect, the analysis isolated the effects of social desirability. Consequently, the main difference in overreporting in national elections and EP elections is not given by the relationship of these two measures (distance in days). The negative overreporting differences show that people tend to overreport more in the EES than in national election surveys, even controlling for confounders.

The second hypothesis of this paper is rejected through the regression analysis. Contrary to our expectations patterns of overreporting in EES and national election surveys in old member states are less similar to each other than in new member states. One of the possible reasons for having such unexpected results, apart from the small sample size, is that the length of EU membership is not a particularly good proxy for European identity in this case; which is partially corroborated by the qualitative part of our empirical analysis.

Indeed, the QCA analysis shows that a large difference in the distance in time ( $ETEI_{CSES} - ETEI_{EES}$ ) together with a positive attitude towards EU issues or towards EP elections are consistently sufficient conditions for a small difference in overreporting between European and national elections. This finding is particularly interesting because it shows that the passing of time tends to decrease people's tendency to overreport. Thus, the overreporting for the European Parliamentary elections is most similar to that of the national elections when the elapsed time between the data collection and the national elections is large, the distance between the survey and the EP elections is small and the level of European identity of the

citizens is high. The last model that we employed for the empirical analysis in this article also corroborates the other findings regarding the effect of time on the phenomenon of overreporting: the high level of European identity in conjunction with the closeness of the data collection to the EP elections fosters a low degree of overreporting that makes the national and the European elections more similar from this point of view.

This analysis can be considered only a starting point in the further investigation of these overreporting differences. As the vote questions is followed by a question directly asking the vote choice of the respondent, a possible research topic would be the investigation of the ‘direction’ of overreporting. Considering the specificity of the European Parliamentary elections, one could argue that the overreporting will not be directed towards the actual ‘winner’ of the European elections. Consequently, one could analyze if this direction of the overreporting is influenced much more intensively by the actual power relations in the national politics of each state, and how these discrepancies in the direction of misreporting varies throughout time or cross-nationally.



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