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Influence in the EU: Measuring Mutual Support*

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Abstract

We assess a country's influence on decision-making in the Council not merely on the basis of the number of its votes, but based on a novel measure that also takes into account the voting behaviour of other countries. A country that is likely to receive support from other countries will be more influential than a country with more votes, but which tends to be isolated in its policy preferences. We apply the methodology to a novel dataset and use it to assess whether changes in voting weights in the Lisbon Treaty influence the odds of whether countries get what they want when decisions are taken in the Council. We show that large Member States are less successful in getting support from others for their positions, while the changes in voting weights increase large Member States' influence, but statistically significant decrease it only for a subgroup of small Member States.

Keywords: EU Council; influence; power index

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Introduction

Achieving and securing influence on the world stage is the fundamental objective of foreign policy for any country. Influence is an amalgam of military, political, economic, cultural and institutional strengths, and is as such difficult to measure. However, in a few cases, a country's influence becomes crystallized in arrangements that provide an objective external anchor that allows a comparison with other countries. One example of this is voting arrangements in the United Nations, which *explicitly* attribute greater powers – including the power to veto resolutions – to a specific small group of nations, the five permanent members of the Security Council. In international relations, however, such examples remain relatively rare, as most treaties attribute equal powers to all signatories.

A particularly interesting example is the attribution of voting rights within the institutional system of the European Union (EU). The ambition of the EU to bring forth ever closer union (cf. Treaty of Rome 1957)¹ amongst its members and its evolution, in particular its enlargement from 6 to 28 members and the gradual but significant extension of its competencies, made it necessary for it to depart from the 'equal voting rights' paradigm amongst its members, differentiating them explicitly in terms of institutional weight.

Formal differentiation amongst the Member States was recognized at the very foundation of the European institutions, in their various incarnations, and took a number of forms besides a differentiation in the number of votes. For example, until November 2004 the four largest Member States nominated two members of the European Commission compared to one nomination for each of the other countries. Larger Member States have also always elected more members to the European Parliament. Most importantly, larger countries have always had a larger number of votes in the Council of Ministers, which is the only institution of the EU where national interests are directly and explicitly represented.² It is interesting to

¹ The origins of co-operation in what is now the European Union (EU) date back to the Treaty of Paris (1951), which established a rather specialized Coal and Steel Community with strong powers over these two key sectors. Subsequently, a series of treaties set up new European institutions and successively extended their remit over an increasing swathe of policy areas.

² Note that the persons nominated to be members of the executive body of the EU, the Commission, take an oath to neither seek nor accept instructions from national governments, while Members of

compare the EU solution with the one adopted in the US Constitution, which faced a similar issue at its foundation. In the US, the solution to the problem of safeguarding the principle of States' equality while reflecting their different demographic weight was to have two legislative Chambers, one – the Senate – in which all states elect two senators irrespective of their population, while in the other Chamber, the House of Representatives, the number of seats for each state depends on the population.

The EU chose a different solution. In both its legislative chambers, the Council³ and the European Parliament, the number of votes allocated to states depends on the population. The number of votes increases with the population but not in a linear fashion, so that smaller countries count proportionally more – as if a compromise was sought between the need to recognize the greater power of larger nations and the wish to uphold the principle of equality among the signatories of an international treaty.

Despite the existence of other, indirect channels for influence, a country's influence in the EU is traditionally assessed mainly on the basis of the number of its votes in the Council of Ministers. This is of course a straightforward metric, and one that has always attracted considerable attention. When, in 2003, negotiations on a new treaty envisaged modifying the weighting votes in order to give greater power to larger Member States, this created very strong opposition. Poland, for example, led a very intense campaign against the proposal, so much that one of the country's parliamentary leaders even coined the expression 'Nice or death' to highlight the implacable opposition to any proposal to adjust the weighting approved in the previous Treaty of Nice. The Polish government held out for a long time against any change in the weighting and relented only after it became isolated (see, for example, Rettman 2007).

However, the number of votes in the Council is an imperfect metric of a country's effective influence on decision-making. Taking into account that many decisions require assembling a qualified majority in favour of a proposal, a country's influence on the final decision will be

the European Parliament do not represent their nations but their constituency and may (and do) vote against the wishes of their national parliaments and governments.

³ Note that the European Council (composed of the heads of states or governments) and the Council of the European Union (officially the Council but also commonly referred to as the Council of Ministers or Consilium) are two different bodies.

maximized if the support for a given proposal falls just short of the required majority, as then a vote cast in favour or against will be decisive. This is the insight behind the Banzhaf power index. That index, however, abstracts from a country's actual policy preferences assuming, for computational purposes, equiprobability of each vote. In actual fact, however, countries are restricted in their voting by their long-term positioning on the policy space. This means that a country which exhibits extreme policy preferences will almost never be in a 'swing vote' position, which maximizes its influence, whereas a country whose policy preferences are sufficiently close to the majority of other Member States will more often be in a position to decide the final outcome of a vote.

The objective of this article is twofold. First, we assess a country's influence not merely on the basis of the number of its votes in the Council of Ministers, but on a more refined measure that takes into account the voting behaviour of the other countries. The insight in this is that a country that is likely to receive support from other countries, on the basis of a similarity of interests, or a country that is likely to garner 'alliances' with like-minded partners in the Council is likely to benefit from more favourable decisions than a country with more votes, but that tends to be isolated in its policy preferences. This more refined measure is then applied to actual voting patterns to reveal the levels of mutual support amongst countries in the Council.

The second objective of the article is to take the modalities of voting in the Council into account. When traditional power indices are used, agents are restricted to a binary yes or no vote. To address this point, we compile a novel dataset of EU Council votes in which we distinguish between no-votes and abstentions and include information on vote statements; our dataset is thus richer than traditional vote datasets considered in the academic literature up to now. On this basis, taking into account the signaling value of declarations, the paper applies the novel quantitative methodology for integrating in one more refined measure the weight and the degree of support enjoyed by each country.

Our analysis thus builds upon the idea that influence on EU decision-making is not a mere function of relative size and thus voting weight, but also about getting support from other Member States. These support levels are given in Tables 1 and 2 and show that, in general, the small Member States are more successful in getting support for their positions than large Member States. The importance of gathering support from others is further illustrated when

we use our methodology to assess whether the changeover from the Nice to the Lisbon Treaty has effectively changed influence on decision-making significantly, as feared by some nations, or whether this has remained essentially unchanged. These changes and their effects are given in Tables 3 and 4 and Figure 1 and show that large Member States indeed tend to gain influence on decisions since their voting weight increases and small Member States tend to lose, but that surprisingly, these decreases are not statistically significant for Austria, Greece, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden, as these countries tend to take similar positions as the Member States that are gaining in voting weight in the Council.

In the existing literature, studies on the influence on EU decision-making are traditionally based on the Penrose (1946), Shapley-Shubik (1954) and Banzhaf (1965) indices. Penrose (1946) argues that the *a priori* voting power of any voter, that is, the likelihood of being on the winning side of a vote, is inversely proportionally to the square root of the number of voters. Based on this measure, the so-called Jagiellonian Compromise (see, for example, Slomczynski and Zyczkowski, 2010) was proposed (and ultimately rejected) for voting weights in the Council following the Nice Treaty. Banzhaf (1965) and Coleman (1971) follow an approach in which voting power is defined as the probability of changing an outcome of a vote; this is known as the Banzhaf power index. Shapley and Shubik (1954) use a similar concept – listing all possible coalitions of voters, and defining voting power as the probability of being pivotal in these coalitions; this is known as the Shapley-Shubik power index. However, both the Banzhaf and the Shapley-Shubik indices start out, for computational reasons, from the highly abstract and unrealistic assumption that all coalitions are equally likely.

Leech and Aziz (2010), Widgrén (2009) and Napel and Widgrén (2011) use these traditional power indices to study the effect of changes in voting weights under the Treaty of Lisbon.⁴ However, similar to the Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik indices this theoretical approach does not take into account preferences and the actual behavior of political actors, and there is an open academic debate whether it should be considered, e.g., Napel and Widgrén (2004), Braham and Holler (2005), and Napel and Widgrén (2005). The indices can also be used for a preference-based analysis, empirical versions of them are discussed by Edelman (1997),

⁴ For a study of the effect of enlargements based on power indices see, for example, Widgrén (1994).

Pajala and Widgrén (2004) and Perlinger (2000). Badinger *et al.* (2014) use empirical and theoretical indices and discusses the differences between the two. In such an approach it is thus not possible to distinguish between abstentions and no-votes, nor to take into account the information conveyed by voting statements that Member States of the EU can make. Moreover, the relevance of approaches based on indices is debated, see Albert (2003), Garret and Tsebelis (1999) and Gelman *et al.* (2004).

Our aim is to firmly link influence and mutual support to actual voting behaviour in the Council and we therefore present an approach that is not based on indices and that takes into account all forms of vote, distinguishing not only between positive votes, negative votes and abstentions, but also voting statements; given the tendency of the Council of Ministers to take decisions unanimously,⁵ it is important to avoid losing any information contained in the Council documents on its legislative activities when measuring mutual support for the positions taken by the Member States.⁶

Section I discusses the basic approach, its assumptions and limitations, while Section II introduces the data and their descriptive statistics. Section III studies the influence Member States have on decision-making in the Council, and the implications of the Treaty of Lisbon. The final section concludes.

I. Basic Approach

This paper aims at investigating the interplay of mutual support between EU Member States through a rigorous quantitative approach, in the context of decision-making in the Council of Ministers. The choice of focusing on the Council is not only due to the objective interest of the field – nowhere else have independent states achieved such a high degree of integration

⁵ For a discussion of unanimity in decision-making, see, e.g., Hayes-Renshaw *et al.* (2006), Mattila and Lane (2001) and Novak (2011).

⁶ This is of particular importance when the number of observations is further reduced, for example, when the different policy areas in which the Council meets are considered separately. This is done by Staal (2016) in a paper discussing how Brexit affects European Union decision-making.

– but also because the Council offers a wealth of vote data that can be used to carry out the analysis on the basis of a quantitative approach, rather than the usual qualitative analysis.⁷

The quantitative approach we develop rests upon the fact that decision-making in the EU is, legally speaking, based on votes that Member States' governments express within the Council of Ministers, one of the two legislative bodies in the EU and the only one to represent directly Member States' governments. Since 1999 the records of these votes have been public. The approach followed disregards the role of the European Parliament, as the vote of its members may be influenced by their nationality but is not an immediate expression of it.⁸

We shall first illustrate the approach and subsequently discuss its assumptions. Suppose Y is a vector describing the result of each vote in the Council. The vector has dimensions $(N,1)$, where N is the number of Member States of the EU at that moment of time. A state can vote against, for, or abstain on any act which is put to the vote (for simplicity we shall henceforth call all Council directives acts, as these contribute the majority of cases). Hence, all votes in the Council under the Treaty of Nice can be described as a matrix in which the columns identify a Member State and the row a particular topic.

However, as highlighted by Hagemann (2008), in addition to the usual choice between casting a positive, negative or abstaining vote, in the Council a Member State can elect to add a formal statement to its vote and have it recorded officially in the Council minutes. Hagemann notes that formal statements are usually put forth by Member States who 'wish to oppose, abstain or who have serious concerns about the decision' and who 'wish to make their reasons for doing so public', and that they 'use the formal statements to voice their opposition against a proposal, while there may be reasons for not doing so by voting' (p. 44). In this latter regard, it must be underlined that a wide body of literature agrees on the existence of informal norms of behaviour within the Council that encourage decision by consensus. The existence of a consensus culture can explain why 'ministers often endorse collective decisions by consensus, even in those cases where they could activate qualified

⁷ Decision-making in the EU and by the Council is described in more detail by Häge (2007, 2008) and Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace (2006) and Hayes-Renshaw *et al.* (2006).

⁸ As highlighted for example by the fact that parliamentary groups are not organized along national, but party lines.

majority voting' (p. 38) and why disagreement is often related to 'technical' decisions rather than political issues (p. 38).

The possibility of adding a formal statement is thus a conscious political choice made to express a more nuanced position regarding a proposal than the one literally implied by the vote taken, signalling that a country would like to limit the significance of a vote or abstention by a public statement. Most declarations take roughly the following form: 'Country X votes in favour but lets it be known that it has objections on the following points ...' or 'Country X votes against (or abstains) but would like to stress that its opposition is limited to the following points ...'. In line with Hagemann, we therefore distinguish votes with formal statements from those without. We interpret these declarations as weakening the vote, because a vote stated with a limiting condition or caveat is by nature a weaker expression of will than a vote expressed unconditionally.

The fact that voting in the Council typically yields wide positive majorities is the reason why we assume that an abstention with a declaration is more 'positive' than an abstention without declaration. The 'normal' vote is assumed to be a yes-vote so that we interpret an abstention accompanied by a declaration as showing a more conciliatory position towards the 'yes' vote than an abstention without declaration. Summing up, we rank the votes as expressing decreasing levels of support as follows: 1) yes-vote without declaration; 2) yes-vote with declaration; 3) abstention with a declaration; 4) abstention without a declaration; 5) vote against with a declaration; and 6) vote against without declaration.

The next step is to use the matrix with the votes to calculate correlations between columns, or between the votes cast by Member States. Since the vote results are measured on an ordinal scale, we have to use a non-parametric measure. We therefore calculate Spearman's ranked correlation coefficient, that is the 'normal' Pearson correlation coefficient based on the ranks of the vote results. Once we have the matrix with the votes, we can calculate all the correlations between the voting behaviours of each country. In the EU with 28 Member States there are $28 \cdot 27 / 2 = 378$ different correlation coefficients. These cross-country correlations (denoted by r) are stochastic variables which measure to what extent the voting behaviour of a given Member State is similar to that of any other EU Member State.

We can test whether the calculated correlations r (which are based on n votes) are significantly different from zero by using:

$$t = r \sqrt{\frac{n-2}{1-r^2}} \quad (1)$$

which approximately has a Student's t -distribution with $n-2$ degrees of freedom under the null hypothesis (the justification is based on a permutation argument, see §27.24 in Stuart *et al.*, 1999).

In the Council, larger countries have larger voting weights. These larger voting weights, however, do not necessarily imply that large Member States have more influence, in actual fact, than small Member States. In the case a large country frequently takes a position that is not shared by other countries, then the positions this country takes do not get much support in the Council. This low level of support will be reflected in low values of the correlations of this country with other Member States.

The support S_i Member State i gets for its positions is composed of its own support and the support the Member State gets from other countries. This can be expressed as the weighted sum of the voting weights of the countries w_j and the correlations r_{ij} with these countries:

$$S_i = \sum_j r_{ij} w_j = w_i + \sum_{j \neq i} r_{ij} w_j. \quad (2)$$

This S Index consists of two parts, the voting weight w_i that country i itself has, plus the support by other countries for the position of country i , given by the sum of the voting weights of other countries j , weighted by the correlations r_{ij} . The lower this index is, the more difficult it will be for a country to shape Council decision-making, either because it frequently takes positions that deviate from those taken by other countries, or since its own voting weight and those weights of countries with similar positions in the Council are low.

One of the reforms introduced the Treaty of Lisbon is a change in the voting weights, which had been previously set in the Treaty of Nice.⁹ By and large, one can say that larger Member States have gained in voting weight. The changes in voting weights have implications for the support in the Council that Member States can expect for their positions. These implications stem from two effects: a (non-stochastic) direct one through the change in voting weight of the respective country, and a (stochastic) indirect one through the changes in the voting weights of the countries that share similar positions as reflected in similar voting behaviour. This indirect effect is stochastic since it is uncertain whether the positions taken by a country will be supported by other countries. The joint effect on the support a Member State i can expect to have, ΔS_i , can thus be determined as a weighted average of the correlations r_{ij} and the differences in voting weights under both Treaties (w_i^{Lisbon} and w_i^{Nice}). These differences are given by:

$$\Delta S_i = w_i^{Lisbon} - w_i^{Nice} + \sum_{j \neq i} r_{ij} (w_j^{Lisbon} - w_j^{Nice}) \quad (3)$$

where w_i^{Lisbon} and w_i^{Nice} are the percentage voting weights under the Lisbon and the Nice Treaties, respectively.

To test whether these changes in support are statistically significant, assume that the stochastic indirect effect (the second term on the right-hand side of equation (3)) is normally distributed with standard deviation $s_{\Delta S}$. Under the null hypothesis that there are no changes in influence, it then holds that:

$$\frac{\Delta S_i}{s_{\Delta S}} \sim t_{26}, \quad (4)$$

where the degrees of freedom are given by the number of Member States that we consider in our analysis–1.¹⁰

Our approach is thus based on two main assumptions. The first is that voting behaviour in the Council of Ministers is shaped, in the long run, by country-specific structural factors that

⁹ Note that the voting rules of the Treaty of Nice apply until 31 October 2014, and that Member States can request the application of these Nice rules until 31 March 2017.

¹⁰ Note that Croatia is not included in the analysis.

are relatively constant. In other words, factors such as geography, economic structure and cultural or political traditions create policy preferences that are fairly stable. This assumption seems intuitively plausible and is in line with the experience showing that, for instance, regarding trade policy EU Member States have tended to retain their free-trade or protectionist bent over long periods of time. This assumption might be criticized as that votes in the Council might not always be driven by long-term interests but also by short-term considerations. Note, however, that for this approach to work, it is not necessary that structural factors determine the vote outcome every time, but merely that they exert a detectable level of influence on voting behaviour.

The second main assumption is that in the Council votes Member States express, on average and in the long run, a correct (or more precisely, asymptotically unbiased) representation of their policy stance. This is a non-trivial assumption, as Member States may at times express a vote that is not in line with their real policy preference, out of short-term political expedience or tactics.

Essentially, divergence of the vote from the real policy preference may happen in three cases. In the first, a Member State is against a given policy in the Council, but realizes that it will be outvoted, it might abstain or go along with the majority to avoid the embarrassment – this is consistent with a theory of high political cost of dissent, either by violating a possible norm of consensus in decision-making in the Council (Novak, 2013, p. 1102) or by avoiding drawing attention from the domestic electorate to the fact of being outvoted (Novak, 2013, p. 1100). The second possibility is that a Member State willingly chooses to vote otherwise than its policy preference, trading its vote with another Member State (or a group of Member States) in exchange for support on another issue that is deemed more important. In the third case, a Member State government may put up fake opposition, or fake support, to please some domestic constituency, knowing, however, that this will have no impact on the decision.

There is little doubt that these cases occur in practice. As already mentioned, most decisions in the Council are taken by unanimity, and this may be taken as a confirmation of the theory

of the political cost of dissent.¹¹ This phenomenon, of course, reduces the preciseness of the estimated correlation. Nevertheless, there are a number of reasons to believe that countries which have stronger alignment of interests will more often vote together than those that do not. Since the methodology is based on ranking policy similarities rather than on measuring them in an absolute form, this kind of effect should not alter the results if a sufficiently long period of data is analyzed. Moreover, there is a sufficiently high number of no votes and abstentions (29.9 per cent of the votes in the data are non-unanimous) to assume that the above theory of high political cost of dissent does not always apply; even more so since we broaden the scope of the analysis from no-votes to also include the milder forms of dissent allowed by the system, such as declarations and abstentions.

II. Data and Descriptive Statistics

The data on voting behaviour are based on the voting records provided by the Council Secretariat.¹² These data cover the definitive legislative acts adopted by the Council and are accompanied by the formal statements Member States have made. An advantage of using these Council monthly summaries is that they include data on all decisions which have been adopted, so there is no risk of a selection bias by excluding some issue areas. Additionally, they make it possible to take into account disagreement between Member States expressed not only by voting but also by the formal statements. These statements are important, since they do not only show that a Member State disagrees with the Commission's proposal, but also put forward country-specific standards related to the proposal. A Member State may choose to make a formal statement as other methods of opposing a majority imply that a Member State is more or less excluded from any further negotiations on a policy proposal (Hagemann, 2007).

As mentioned previously, a potential limitation is that we refer to the Member States' final voting positions, which might not properly reflect the 'real' preference of the Member States. A number of papers, however, show that there is a connection between policy

¹¹Another possibility is that Member States can and do agree on certain issues ahead of coming to a formal vote. This, however, should lead to a high clustering of votes just around the minimal threshold needed for the passage of a proposal. No such a pattern is detectable in the vote records.

¹² Available online at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/>.

positions and voting in the Council.¹³ In addition, there tends to be no formal vote in the Council on proposals on which a positive decision appears unlikely: Hayes-Renshaw *et al.* (2006) and Novak (2014) discuss several ways that the norms of consensus and unanimity may distort the voting records. Hosli *et al.* (2011), however, write that ‘knowing that other governments in the Council contest a proposal may encourage other members to follow suit’, which we see as a motivation to base the analysis on the subset of non-unanimous Council decisions.

We base the correlations on the votes which were held from February 2003 until December 2012. In this period there were 1,762 votes,¹⁴ 585 of them non-unanimous.¹⁵ On these 585 non-unanimous votes on proposals, the 28 Member States’ ministers have cast in total 14,275 votes, of which 13,527 were votes in favour, 12,397 without and 1,130 with statements; 380 abstentions, 300 without and 80 with statements; 369 votes against, 219 without and 149 with statements. In relative terms, the share of votes accompanied by a statement grows going from ‘yes’ votes over abstentions to ‘no’ votes: ‘yes’ votes with declarations are 8.4 per cent of positive votes, abstentions with statements are 21.1 per cent, whereas ‘no’ votes with statements are 40.4 per cent of all negative. In other words, when a Member State expresses stronger dissent, it is more likely to issue a vote declaration. This can be considered to indirectly confirm the idea that dissent is politically costly in the Council and that statements usually serve the role of nuancing a country’s expressed position. The higher share of nuance expressed in ‘no’ votes thus reflects the higher political costs of a ‘no’ vote that we have mentioned before: there is greater need or a greater political interest in justifying a ‘no’ vote than in justifying a ‘yes’ vote or an abstention.

¹³ See, for example, Arregui and Thomson (2014), Bailer *et al.* (2015), Høyland and Wøien Hansen (2014) and Toshkov (2017).

¹⁴ For the countries that joined the Union on May 2004 (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia): 1,408 votes, and for the countries that joined the Union on January 2007 (Bulgaria, Romania): 985 votes.

¹⁵ For the countries that joined the Union on May 2004: 479 votes, and for the countries that joined the Union on January 2007: 355 votes.

Table 1: Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficients based on Non-unanimous Council Votes.

	Bel.	Bul.	Cyp.	Cze.	Den.	Est.	Fin.	Fra.	Ger.	Gre.	Hun.	Ire.	Ita.	Lat.	Lit.	Lux.	Mal.	Net.	Pol.	Por.	Rom.	Slk.	Slv.	Spa.	Swe.	UK.
Aus.	0.07	0.12	0.10	0.14	0.09	0.17	0.17	0.15	0.22	0.08	0.05	0.07	0.11	0.10	0.09	0.21	0.06	0.15	0.08	0.20	0.20	0.19	0.15	0.03	0.17	0.03
Bel.		0.18	0.16	0.13	0.17	0.22	0.22	0.26	0.04	0.25	0.26	0.22	0.14	0.19	0.21	0.33	0.10	0.16	0.05	0.16	0.26	0.18	0.31	0.20	0.17	0.05
Bul.			0.21	0.31	0.14	0.30	0.31	0.23	0.05	0.19	0.17	0.17	0.18	0.25	0.32	0.18	0.14	0.06	0.12	0.21	0.27	0.16	0.25	0.21	0.24	0.01
Cyp.				0.20	0.11	0.19	0.17	0.11	0.03	0.34	0.19	0.18	0.08	0.22	0.24	0.22	0.25	0.10	0.15	0.12	0.15	0.22	0.26	0.17	0.07	0.03
Cze.					0.15	0.37	0.23	0.17	0.03	0.17	0.18	0.11	0.11	0.36	0.40	0.26	0.16	0.13	0.24	0.22	0.23	0.37	0.32	0.07	0.19	0.07
Den.						0.22	0.21	0.15	0.09	0.22	0.14	0.21	0.09	0.18	0.19	0.16	0.03	0.28	0.10	0.13	0.19	0.08	0.14	0.16	0.39	0.10
Est.							0.37	0.22	0.10	0.27	0.17	0.15	0.15	0.49	0.39	0.27	0.10	0.20	0.31	0.22	0.42	0.44	0.27	0.16	0.25	0.07
Fin.								0.19	0.11	0.23	0.18	0.22	0.16	0.30	0.31	0.24	0.11	0.19	0.24	0.27	0.30	0.18	0.33	0.17	0.36	0.03
Fra.									0.21	0.30	0.09	0.17	0.17	0.20	0.17	0.20	0.12	0.17	0.08	0.33	0.23	0.02	0.08	0.26	0.19	0.06
Ger.										0.21	0.05	0.12	0.06	0.13	0.12	0.12	0.04	0.09	0.07	0.10	0.02	0.05	-0.01	0.05	0.12	-0.06
Gre.											0.21	0.19	0.24	0.25	0.24	0.26	0.12	0.18	0.18	0.33	0.23	0.08	0.17	0.24	0.18	0.08
Hun.												0.09	0.07	0.17	0.31	0.17	0.16	0.03	0.21	0.13	0.20	0.26	0.24	0.10	0.10	0.07
Ire.													0.14	0.13	0.15	0.19	0.08	0.24	0.02	0.16	0.21	0.11	0.20	0.25	0.19	0.26
Ita.														0.15	0.17	0.17	0.14	0.09	0.02	0.27	0.31	0.21	0.19	0.25	0.10	0.01
Lat.															0.44	0.23	0.12	0.17	0.25	0.21	0.32	0.36	0.28	0.17	0.15	0.08
Lit.																0.22	0.17	0.18	0.39	0.26	0.43	0.38	0.30	0.15	0.24	0.09
Lux.																	0.12	0.19	0.09	0.22	0.27	0.27	0.31	0.17	0.18	0.11
Mal.																		0.03	0.11	0.18	0.19	0.21	0.13	0.21	0.03	0.02
Net.																			0.06	0.13	0.16	0.11	0.15	0.14	0.41	0.16
Pol.																				0.19	0.24	0.29	0.20	0.04	0.10	-0.05
Por.																					0.30	0.15	0.21	0.29	0.18	0.07
Rom.																						0.34	0.45	0.25	0.23	0.04
Slk.																							0.32	0.12	0.05	0.07
Slv.																								0.13	0.20	0.09
Spa.																									0.23	0.09
Swe.																										0.18

Notes: **0.XX**: significant at 1%; **0.XX** significant at 5%; *0.XX*: significant at 10%.

These correlations based on the non-unanimous votes under the Treaty of Nice are reported in Table 1. They give us a clear mapping of how Member States support – or oppose – each other in the Council. This can be used to identify which Member States are, *de facto*, ‘allies’ in EU policy – in the sense that they tend to support each other’s positions, and those whose interests are not aligned and tend to oppose each other.

Note that the highest degrees of mutual support are generally found between small Member States. The top correlations are indeed dominated by small countries couplings.¹⁶ Large countries, however, typically have lower correlations, especially, and perhaps not unexpectedly, this holds for the United Kingdom, but also for Germany and to a lesser extent for Italy and France.

These results lend themselves to some reflection on the cause of the weaker support that large states obtain. It seems likely that small Member States are more receptive to the idea that they need to co-operate with one another to shape policy, and for this reason are more amenable to the idea of forming more permanent ‘alliances’, accepting the need to vote as a block more frequently than large Member States. Large Member States may instead believe that they are powerful enough to influence decision-making directly and therefore have no special need to form voting blocks.

Other potential patterns in voting behaviour, however, are less clear. While, for example, Thomson *et al.* (2004) claim that there is a north–south division, and Zimmer *et al.* (2005) argue that this division is a conflict between net-contributors and net-beneficiaries, such a pattern is not immediately recognizable in Table 1. Recognizing general patterns in the correlations thus pledges to be a promising avenue for further research.

The correlations presented in Table 1 can be used for determining how much support each Member State gets for its position in the Council. This can be done by using equation (2), the results are presented in Table 2, in which we have used the voting weights under the Treaty

¹⁶ The highest correlations are between the Czech Republic/Lithuania; Estonia/Latvia; Estonia/Romania; Estonia/Slovakia; Latvia/Lithuania; Lithuania/Romania; the Netherlands/Sweden; and Romania/Slovenia.

Table 2: Support from others calculated using the voting weights under the Treaty of Lisbon.

	Support from others
United Kingdom	0.0270
Germany	0.0613
Poland	0.0693
Malta	0.1036
Hungary	0.1051
Italy	0.1069
Cyprus	0.1073
Austria	0.1204
Netherlands	0.1274
Czech Republic	0.1294
Denmark	0.1333
Slovakia	0.1346
Spain	0.1385
Belgium	0.1411
Bulgaria	0.1441
Slovenia	0.1471
France	0.1506
Ireland	0.1656
Sweden	0.1686
Luxembourg	0.1699
Finland	0.1707
Latvia	0.1775
Romania	0.1776
Estonia	0.1894
Lithuania	0.1979
Portugal	0.1986
Greece	0.2046

of Lisbon. It shows that small Member States manage to get much more support for their positions than their own voting weight would suggest; for example, a country like Greece gets a lot of support for its position, while the United Kingdom and Germany get less.¹⁷ In

¹⁷ In assessing the data, one should bear in mind that not all policy domains require a (qualified) majority; frequently, unanimity is required. Obviously, the levels of support measured by the methodology primarily apply to those domains with majority voting.

addition, it shows that France and Spain are much better than Italy and Poland in getting support for the positions they take in the Council, and can thus expect to exert more influence on decision-making.

Finally, it is quite striking that Germany achieves such a low level of support from other Member States. Despite its economic and political significance, Germany is just above the UK in garnering the support of other Member States. These data may suggest some difficulty for Germany in garnering support for its vision for the EU. However, an alternative explanation, often put forward informally in Brussels, is that Germany's federal structure forces the negotiating team in the Council to stick to a predetermined position agreed with the Länder, even though this may be unrealistic in terms of negotiating in the Council.

III. Influence in the Council

In this section we analyze the influence the member states have on decision-making in the Council. We then look at the effect of the changes in voting weights under the Treaty of Lisbon in more detail.

As becomes clear from the voting weights given in Table 3, larger countries have a larger voting weight under both treaties. These larger voting weights, however, do not necessarily imply that larger member states have more influence than smaller ones. In the case a large country frequently takes a position that is not shared by other countries, then the positions this country takes do not get much support in the Council, and the large country does not succeed in influencing decision-making in such a way that it gets a decision in line with its preferences. These low levels of support are then reflected in low values of the correlations of this country, and an example of such a country is the UK. The support that Member States get for their positions, calculated using (2), are reported in the first and second columns of Table 4, using the voting weights under the Treaty of Nice and Treaty of Lisbon, respectively. We can clearly see two effects determining the influence countries have: (i) the voting weight of the respective country, and (ii) the correlations of a country with other countries. The first is an important explanation of why Cyprus and Malta have relatively small influence on decision-making in the Council, while the second indirect effect explains why Germany and Italy do not have the biggest influence, even though these large countries have a high voting weight. This is illustrated by the sixth column of Table 4 that shows the support

countries get for their positions from the other countries. This support is especially big for Estonia and Lithuania, and remarkably small for the United Kingdom.

One of the implications of the Treaty of Lisbon is the change in the voting weights. These voting weights were previously set in the Treaty of Nice, in which there was a more obvious

Table 3: Voting weights.

	Nice		Lisbon	
	votes	%	population ('000)	%
Austria	10	2.9	8,199	1.7
Belgium	12	3.5	10,392	2.1
Bulgaria	10	2.9	7,322	1.5
Cyprus	4	1.2	788	0.2
Czech Republic	12	3.5	10,228	2.1
Denmark	7	2.0	5,468	1.1
Estonia	4	1.2	1,315	0.3
Finland	7	2.0	5,238	1.1
France	29	8.4	63,713	13.0
Germany	29	8.4	82,400	16.8
Greece	12	3.5	10,706	2.2
Hungary	12	3.5	9,956	2.0
Ireland	7	2.0	4,109	0.8
Italy	29	8.4	58,147	12.9
Latvia	4	1.2	2,259	0.5
Lithuania	7	2.0	3,575	0.7
Luxembourg	4	1.2	480	0.1
Malta	3	0.9	401	0.1
Netherlands	13	3.8	16,570	3.3
Poland	27	7.8	38,518	7.9
Portugal	12	3.5	10,642	2.1
Romania	14	4.1	22,276	4.5
Slovakia	7	2.0	5,447	1.1
Slovenia	4	1.2	2,009	0.4
Spain	27	7.8	40,448	8.2
Sweden	10	2.9	9,031	1.8
UK	29	8.4	60,776	12.4
Total	345		490,426,060	

Notes: The voting weights under the Treaty of Nice are taken from Declaration No. 20 of the Treaty, the population sizes are taken from the CIA World Factbook 2007, the year negotiations on the Treaty of Lisbon took place.

Table 4: Measures of Support (calculated using expressions (2) and (3) Member States get for their positions with the voting weights under the Treaty of Nice and under the Treaty of Lisbon.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Support (Nice)	Support (Lisbon)	Change in support	Change in voting weight	Change in support from others	Support from others (Nice)	% change in support from others
	(starting point)	(end point)	(col.2 - col.1) = (col.4 + col.5)	(direct effect)	(indirect effect)		(col.5 / col.6) * 100
Austria	0.143	0.137	-0.006	-0.012	0.006	0.114	5.29
Belgium	0.190	0.163	-0.026 **	-0.013	-0.014	0.155	-8.83
Bulgaria	0.191	0.159	-0.032 ***	-0.014	-0.019	0.163	-11.5
Cyprus	0.144	0.109	-0.035 ***	-0.010	-0.025	0.133	-19.0
Czech Republic	0.193	0.149	-0.043 ***	-0.015	-0.028	0.158	-18.0
Denmark	0.144	0.144	-0.020 *	-0.009	-0.011	0.144	-7.63
Estonia	0.228	0.192	-0.036 ***	-0.009	-0.026	0.216	-12.3
Finland	0.214	0.181	-0.032 ***	-0.010	-0.023	0.193	-11.7
France	0.245	0.229	0.034 ***	0.044	-0.010	0.161	-6.23
Germany	0.156	0.226	0.070 ***	0.080	-0.010	0.072	-14.5
Greece	0.236	0.227	-0.009	-0.013	0.003	0.201	1.68
Hungary	0.160	0.125	-0.035 ***	-0.015	-0.020	0.125	-16.2
Ireland	0.181	0.175	-0.006	-0.013	0.005	0.161	3.09
Italy	0.207	0.227	0.020 *	0.036	-0.016	0.123	-12.8
Latvia	0.210	0.182	-0.028 **	-0.007	-0.021	0.199	-10.6
Lithuania	0.243	0.205	-0.038 ***	-0.014	-0.024	0.222	-11.0
Luxembourg	0.196	0.171	-0.025 **	-0.011	-0.014	0.184	-7.58
Malta	0.121	0.104	-0.017	-0.008	-0.009	0.111	-7.85
Netherlands	0.172	0.161	-0.011	-0.004	-0.007	0.134	-5.13
Poland	0.176	0.145	-0.030 **	-0.002	-0.028	0.098	-29.0
Portugal	0.238	0.221	-0.013	-0.013	-0.000	0.200	-0.22
Romania	0.248	0.220	-0.029 **	0.001	-0.030	0.208	-14.4
Slovakia	0.183	0.145	-0.038 ***	-0.009	-0.028	0.163	-17.3
Slovenia	0.193	0.151	-0.042 ***	-0.008	-0.035	0.182	-19.1
Spain	0.225	0.231	0.006	0.014	-0.008	0.146	-5.37
Sweden	0.204	0.187	-0.017	-0.011	-0.007	0.175	-3.89
UK	0.129	0.151	0.022 *	0.040	-0.018	0.044	-39.4

Notes: The differences between these measures of support, indicated is whether these differences are significantly different from 0 (using expression 4) at the * 10%, ** 5% or *** 1% significance levels; and whether this differences are due to the change of its own voting weight or the changes in the voting weights of the other member states.

Figure 1: Changes under the Treaty of Lisbon in Influence Member States have (see Equation (4)) and whether these Differences are due to the Change of their own Voting Weight or the Changes in the Voting Weights of their Fellow Member States.

overrepresentation of the small Member States in comparison with the Treaty of Lisbon, as becomes clear from Table 3. The joint effect of these changes on the influence a Member State has can be determined using equation (3). These values are reported in Table 4 and illustrated in Figure 1.¹⁸

We can clearly see the direct effect of changes in voting weights contributes to the increases in influence of Germany, France and the UK. Even though the support these big countries get for their positions diminishes, this decrease (the indirect effect) is more than offset by (the direct effect of) the increases in their own voting weights.

In the group of middle-sized countries, the own weights change relatively little. For Spain, it holds that the support from other countries also changes relatively little, and hence the changes in voting weights do not have a significant impact on the influence Spain has on decision-making in the EU. This does not hold for Poland and Romania, however, which lose influence due to the fact that the support they get for their positions predominantly comes from countries which are losing voting weight.

The group of small countries can be divided in two subgroups. Even though voting weight of all these countries is decreased under the Treaty of Lisbon, it holds that the support for the positions taken in one subgroup (Austria, Greece, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden) predominantly comes from countries that are gaining in voting weight. A look at Table 1 shows that these countries have strongly significant positive correlation coefficients with at least three of the biggest four Member States that are gaining most voting weight.¹⁹ For all the other countries this is not the case, and hence the change in support that these countries get from others (Column (5) in Table 4) is negative.

Contrary to the existing literature, we distinguish between abstentions and negative votes, and take statements into account. We therefore get results that contrast significantly with those based on these traditional measures of voting power, such as those presented in Widgrén (2009). This paper uses the Shapley-Shubik voting-power index to calculate how the voting powers of Member States change due to changes in the voting weights in the Treaty

¹⁸ Normality of the stochastic part of support is not rejected by the Cramer-von Mises, the Watson or the Anderson-Darling tests. The p -values were 0.65, 0.64 and 0.52, respectively.

¹⁹ The exception is Malta, with strongly significant positive correlations with France, Italy, Romania and Spain.

of Lisbon. That approach predicts that the large Member States would gain in voting power, but concludes that the United Kingdom would gain slightly more than France, while we show that, when taking into account actual voting behaviour, France performs better than the UK as its policy preferences are better aligned with those of other Member States gaining voting power. Another remarkable similar case relates to Spain, which is supposed to lose voting power in an abstract index approach whereas we show that it actually gained support when looking at actual voting behaviour. Our conclusions also differ significantly from Badinger *et al.* (2014) who present a theoretical and an empirical approach using the Banzhaf and Shapley-Shubik indices; in the latter, the voting-power indices are adjusted in such a way that the preferences of Member States, estimated using an item-response model, are taken into account. In this approach small countries like Estonia have low voting-power indices, whereas we come to the opposite conclusion that the positions taken by Estonia get relatively high support in the Council, on account of their alignment with many other countries with a bigger voting weight.

Conclusions

We introduce a method to measure the relationship in voting behaviour when there are several forms of dissent (such as abstentions, declarations, no votes) and apply this method to voting in the Council of Ministers. We use this method to analyze the influence countries have on decision-making and to predict voting behaviour in the Council. The improvement to the previous literature is that our method can take several forms of dissent into account, as well as the support a country gets from other countries.

Two main insights stand out. First, the literature based on the Banzhaf and Shapley indices, by neglecting the policy preferences in *other* Member States with whom their interests are closely and systematically aligned, may come to wrong conclusions on the influence on decision-making in the Council. Our approach, in contrast to previous analysis, shows this to be the case for the small Member States Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and Romania. On the contrary, we found that some larger countries often find themselves aligned against the majority and therefore tend to be outvoted. The most striking case is the United Kingdom, but this also frequently occurs to Germany and Poland.

The second insight refers to the shifts in influence on decision-making from the Nice to the Lisbon Treaty. It is well known that the changes in voting weights in the Treaty of Lisbon increase the weights of the four biggest Member States and decrease the weights of most of the smaller countries. However, the shifts acquire a different meaning when looking not just at the simple changes in voting weights, but also at the degree of support received on average by each country. In other words, what counts is not only the changes in one's own voting weights, but in the voting weights of other Member States that tend to take similar positions in the Council. The clearest examples of this are Austria, Greece, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden: even though they lost voting weights under the Treaty of Lisbon, they did not lose influence on decision-making as their positions are typically shared by one or more of the four biggest countries that were gaining voting weights. Overall, our approach supplies a quantification of how much influence can be gained by smaller Member States through co-operative voting behaviour, but at the same point highlights that they differ substantially in the amount of support that they can attract from other Member States.

Several topics we are forced to leave for further research. For example, our methodology of measuring mutual support between Member States identifies neither which countries are 'leaders' or 'followers' nor which countries obtain more support because their policy preferences are relatively centric. In the first case, one can use the approach by Arregui and Thomson (2014) – they calculate the value of mutual imports and exports between two Member States as a percentage of both, and define the one with the highest ratio as the follower, as its economic dependence on the other Member State is the highest. In the second case mentioned, how (ec)centric policy preferences are, can be studied by, for example, a cluster analysis, as is done in Hayes-Renshaw *et al.* (2006) and numerous other studies.

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