Explaining the Salience of Anti-Eraite and Anti-Corruption Discourse in European Parties with the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey Data

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Abstract

This research note addresses the variation of anti-corruption and anti-elite salience across party platforms in Europe. It demonstrates that while anti-corruption salience is primarily related to the (regional) context in which a party operates, anti-elite salience is primarily a function of party ideology. Extreme left and extreme conservative (TAN) parties are significantly more likely to emphasize anti-elite views. Through its use of the new 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey wave, the research note also introduces the dataset.
1 Introduction

What explains variation in the salience of anti-elite and anti-corruption rhetoric for political parties across Europe? These questions have been significant to many if not most of the party systems of central and eastern Europe since their transitions from communism (Vachudova 2009, Hanley and Sikk 2014, Engler 2015), but corruption has also been a persistent problem in Southern Europe (Banfield 1958, Putnam 1994, Charron et al. 2014). Recently, the rise of the 5 Star Movement, Syriza, and Podemos illustrate the contemporary relevance of anti-elite rhetoric and political competition surrounding corruption, and contemporary research indicates that politicizing corruption can be electorally advantageous for certain types of parties (Bågenholm and Charron 2014, Hanley and Sikk 2014).

In this paper we examine these issues via two new items included in the 2014 wave of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES). In the process, we also introduce this most recent round of the longest running expert survey on party positioning in European democracies. We show two things: political corruption is much more salient among parties in southern and eastern Europe than in western and northern Europe. Anti-elite salience, however, is more a function of ideology. Extreme leftist and extreme socially conservative parties are most likely to oppose political elites, while their regional origin is largely irrelevant.

2 The 2014 Wave of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey

Administered in 2014 to 337 political scientists specializing in political parties and European integration, the 2014 CHES provides information about the positioning of 268 parties on political ideology, European integration, and various policy areas. The survey covers political parties in 31 countries, including all European Union member states plus Norway,
Switzerland and Turkey.\textsuperscript{2} The 2014 survey can be combined with prior waves to produce a trend file with five time points from 1999 to 2014, making the CHES the longest running, most extensive expert survey on political parties in Europe available (Bakker et al. 2015).

\section{Cross-validating the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey}

Prior waves of the CHES data have been cross-validated with a variety of alternative sources of party positioning information (Marks et al. 2007, Steenbergen and Marks 2007, Hooghe et al. 2010, Bakker et al. 2015). These show an acceptably high level of correlation, particularly with placements derived from aggregate voter placements—a finding consistent with other recent research (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2012, Dalton and McAllister 2015).\textsuperscript{3}

In this section we assess the validity of the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey. To do this, we compare mean expert placements of political parties across Europe with mean individual respondent evaluations of the same parties. An ideal alternative source of information on party placements to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey comes from the 2014 European Election Study (EES) (Schmitt, Hobolt, and Popa 2015, Schmitt et al. 2015). This study was conducted after the European Parliament elections of May 2014, and is thus temporally close to the time when the Chapel Hill Expert Survey went out to the party experts (November 2014).\textsuperscript{4} Thanks to coordination between the two research teams, CHES and EES share a number of questions with identical or similar wording and scales.

For the purpose of comparing party placements across CHES experts and EES respondents, we focus on the general left-right placement of parties. CHES experts were asked to place

\footnote{In one of the first published expert surveys on party positioning, Huber and Inglehart (1995) aimed for at least five completed surveys per country. Users should note that there were fewer than five completed surveys for Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, and Norway in the 2014 CHES data.}

\footnote{Furthermore, Bakker et al. (2014) demonstrate the cross-national comparability of expert assessments.}

\footnote{The risk of contamination is low because the data from the EES were not released to academic users when CHES was in the field.}
parties with the following question:

*Please tick the box that best describes each party’s overall ideology on a scale ranging from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right).*

EES respondents were asked to place parties in their country with the following question:

*And about where would you place the following political parties on this scale? How about the [party name]? Which number from 0 to 10, where ‘0’ means ‘left’ and ‘10’ means ‘right’ best describes this party?*

When we compare the mean general left-right placement across CHES experts and EES respondents, the two placements correlate at $r = 0.893$. Figure 1 depicts the distribution of the differences between expert and respondent placement and reveals that these are quite normally distributed with a mean of 0.287 and a mode of 0, and that 93 percent of the absolute observed differences do not exceed 2 points on the 0-10 general left-right scale.

Positive placement differences indicate that CHES experts place the given party to the right of the EES respondents. Negative placement differences indicate that CHES experts place the given party to the left of the EES respondents. Interestingly, these discrepancies are not random. They are a function of the party’s placement on the general left-right scale.

Figure 2 depicts the relationship between the placement difference and party ideological position on the general left-right scale. It demonstrates that experts tend to place right-wing parties more to the right than do individuals, while placing left-wing parties more to the left. This finding reveals a tendency on the part of experts to place parties more to the extremes than do individual respondents. This tendency is more pronounced for right-
wing parties than for left-wing parties. Overall, we conclude that the 2014 CHES survey provides largely valid estimates of party positioning, highly comparable with those derived from an established independent estimate. The next section turns to examine the regional and ideological underpinnings of variation in anti-elite and anti-corruption salience scores assessed by CHES experts.

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5Benoit and Laver reported small overall levels of systematic bias in their expert survey but some bias in the placement of extreme right-wing parties (2006, 92). See also Curini 2010.
Figure 2: Predicting CHES expert and EES respondent party placement difference with party ideological placement

CHES 2014 and EES 2014.

4 Anti-Elite and Anti-Corruption Salience for Political Parties Across Europe

For the first time, the 2014 CHES included questions about the “salience of anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric” and the “salience of reducing political corruption” for the political parties of Europe. All experts were asked to provide salience scores for all parties in a given party system on these two questions; responses could range from 0 (not at all important) to 10 (very important).
To assess the variation in how much parties emphasize anti-elite and anti-corruption appeals, we model party salience as a function of ideology, region and party type. First, we expect that political parties on the ideological extremes are more likely to emphasize the shortcomings of the political system, be it by pointing out its corrupt character or the aloofness of its political elite. Both orientations are features of populism, a thin ideology most readily found in parties of the radical right and radical left (Mudde 2004, 549). Furthermore, we expect this to be the case whether we consider ideology as party positions on economic left-right, or as placement on the socio-cultural (GAL-TAN) dimension spanning from social liberalism to social conservatism. All extremes should be more inclined to criticize the political establishment and point out political corruption.

Secondly, we also expect that the salience of anti-establishment and anti-corruption rhetoric should differ across the regions of Europe. While southern and eastern European countries are regarded as having widespread corruption at the highest levels of government, the prevalence of corruption is considerably lower in the west and the north of the continent (Charron et al. 2014). Finally, in line with Bågenholm and Charron (2014) we expect that the salience of anti-establishment and anti-corruption rhetoric will be greater for new parties than for older established competitors. Consequently, we estimate a simple model of anti-elite and anti-corruption salience. This model is not intended to exhaustively explain anti-elite and anti-corruption salience, but uncovers some key sources of their variance across Europe. The model is specified as follows:

\[
salience_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \ast econ\_left\_right_i + \beta_2 \ast econ\_left\_right_i^2 + \beta_3 \ast galtan_i + \beta_4 \ast galtan_i^2 + \beta_5 \ast North_i + \beta_6 \ast South_i + \beta_7 \ast East_i + \beta_8 \ast New_i + \epsilon_i
\]

\[6\]Of course an emphasis on reducing political corruption does not necessarily make a party populist, but many populist parties do emphasize the corruption of elected officials.
Here North, South and East are dummy variables indicating the regional location of a given party. Western Europe is the baseline category. The variable New is a dummy variable that is 1 if a party enters the CHES dataset for the first time in 2014, and zero if it has appeared in previous CHES datasets.

We summarize the results in Figures 3 and 4 and provide details in table 1 of the appendix. As expected, anti-corruption salience is strongly influenced by a party’s regional location, and to a lesser extent by its ideology. As Figure 3 demonstrates, southern and eastern European parties emphasize corruption issues much more than their western and northern European counterparts. Not surprisingly, northern European parties give least emphasis to corruption. Turning to ideology, we see statistically significant, but substantively weak support for our expectation of a curvilinear relationship between economic left-right and socio-cultural preferences and anti-corruption salience. The more extreme a party is on either of these dimensions, the more likely it is to emphasize corruption issues. Finally, we see significant evidence that new parties emphasize anti-corruption issues more than their more established competitors.

The analysis of anti-elite salience presents a number of notable findings. First, Figure 4 shows that while the regional differences in anti-elite salience follow a similar pattern as those of anti-corruption salience, the differences between the regions are not statistically significant. The larger confidence intervals around the means suggest that there is greater variance of anti-elite salience within the regions. Second, the figure demonstrates that this variance is largely a function of party ideology. While extreme parties tend to emphasize their opposition to political elites, the figure demonstrates that the salience is significantly

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7 North: Denmark, Finland, Sweden; South: Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain; East: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia; West: Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Great Britain.

8 Croatia, Cyprus, Luxembourg, and Malta are new additions to the 2014 dataset and were consequently dropped from these models because all parties in these countries would have been ‘new’ in 2014. Regressions without the New variable but including these four countries produce substantively comparable results for the other variables of interest.
Figure 3: Predicting anti-corruption salience with ideological placement

Predicted values with 95% confidence intervals. CHES 2014

greater for radical left and TAN parties. Note also that the effect of economic and GAL-TAN placement on anti-elite salience is substantively much stronger than it is for anti-corruption salience. The finding that anti-elite parties are primarily located on the TAN side of the GAL-TAN dimension and on the left side of the economical left-right dimension confirms prior expectations (Kriesi 2007, Hooghe and Marks 2009). Hence, emphasizing opposition to elites brings together two groups of parties – the extreme left and the extreme TAN – that generally position themselves quite far from one another on all other issues, at least in Western Europe.\(^9\) Finally, the figure also supports the expectation that new parties place greater emphasis on opposing political elites than do established parties.

\(^9\)See Rovny (2014) for details.
In sum, we find that anti-corruption salience is best explained by regional location and party age. Political parties from southern and eastern Europe pay much more attention to political corruption than those from the west and north. Similarly, new parties emphasize anti-corruption issues more than established parties. While political ideology is significant in a model for anti-corruption, the substantive effect is small. Anti-elite salience, by contrast, is primarily a function of ideology and party age. Extreme leftist and extreme TAN parties are most likely to oppose political elites, while their regional origin is largely irrelevant. As with anti-corruption salience, new parties tend to emphasize anti-elite rhetoric more than established parties.
5 Discussion

We conclude by briefly examining the relevance of anti-corruption salience in 2014 for two European party systems: Greece and Sweden. As expected, Figure 5 suggests that reducing corruption is much more relevant for the political parties of Greece than for those of Sweden. Yet, in both countries we see some evidence that newer parties tend to emphasize fighting corruption more than established ones. Even though the salience of corruption is comparatively low in Sweden, the issue is more important to the Pirate Party, the Sweden Democrats, and the Feminist Initiative, all of which are relatively new parties in the Swedish system. Similarly in Greece, the salience of reducing corruption is high for The River (Potami) and Syriza compared to more established parties like New Democracy and PASOK. Finally, it is worth noting that although the current Greek government of Syriza and the Independent Greeks (ANEL) are quite different in terms of overall left-right positioning, these parties share an emphasis on reducing corruption in addition to ambivalent stances towards the European Union (the latter not shown here).

![Graph](a) Corruption Salience - Greece  (b) Corruption Salience - Sweden

Figure 5: Salience of Reducing Corruption, by party

Understanding the salience of political corruption for parties in southern and eastern Europe is important, not only because of the profound and debilitating impact of corruption on the
capacity of states and on the welfare of citizens, but also because anti-corruption appeals have transformed the nature of political competition and displaced traditional socio-economic appeals. This research note has shown that party-based, anti-elite salience is closely related to ideology, but that the salience of political corruption for parties is more closely tied to region. These results hold in the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey data together with – and controlling for – the more general finding that newer parties tend to emphasize both issues more than older parties, consistent with previous research. These new questions included in 2014 supplement core items in the CHES that have now been collected over five time points, making the dataset an increasingly useful source of information for dynamic analysis of party positioning across Europe.
References


Table 1: OLS regression results

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Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1