The issues of immigration and European integration raise fundamental questions about the social structure of politics. These issues are part of a deep divide about the meaning and implications of national community that has gained huge salience in western societies. Many use the term tribal to describe the divide. To what extent is political conflict over transnationalism a social as well as a cultural phenomenon?

The answer to this question bears directly on our understanding of party competition. Is the new line of conflict more than just a dimension on which individuals and political parties have preferences? Is the conflict evidence of dealignment, of diminishing association between party competition and social structure? Or is this a new cleavage that involves conflict among structurally distinctive social groups?

Voters for political parties on the transnational divide—green and radical TAN parties—are distinguished by their level of education, their occupation, where they live, and whether they are female or male. These differences do not appear to be diminishing over time. They are more pronounced among younger generations of voters than older generations.
Consequently, we are drawn to reassess the idea that socially structured political cleavages are a thing of the past. Among the implications of neo-cleavage theory are that the dynamism in party systems arises from exogenous social change; that the party-political response comes chiefly in the form of new political parties that rise on a new cleavage; that processes of alignment and dealignment coexist as new divides become solidified among voters while old divides lose causal power; and that the decline of social structure among parties on a prior cleavage can go hand in hand with considerable social structuration on a new cleavage.

The rise of a transnational cleavage suggests that, far from being frozen, party systems are subject to exogenous shocks that can produce durable divides. Neo-cleavage theory shares with classical cleavage theory the premise that change comes in response to rare, and major, exogenous shocks. The shocks that have been observed so far are the rise of the national state which produced a center-periphery cleavage and a religious cleavage; the industrial revolution which produced an urban-rural and a class cleavage; and, we argue, the perforation of national states producing a transnational cleavage. The first cleavage arose with the breakdown of a supranational order and the establishment of strong territorial bureaucracies imposing national religions and languages. The last cleavage has, as its core, a conflict over the role of the national state and national community in an era of transnationalism. Neo-cleavage theory suggests that the two issues of the day—Europe and immigration—are at the core of a fundamental restructuration of conflict signalled by the rise of new political parties with distinctive constituencies.

**Responding to the crisis: Eurosceptic parties of the left and right and their changing position towards the European Union**

Daniela Braun, Sebastian Popa, Hermann Schmitt

At the time of the election of the European Parliament (EP) in 2014, the European Union (EU) was heavily affected by a multi-faceted crisis which had—and still has—far-reaching implications for the political system of its member-countries, but also for the European level of governance. Recently published scholarly work illustrates that the electoral system has been affected by these crises. However, the majority of publications devoted their attention in this regard to the voter’s side of the electoral connection exploring the changing motives of voting behavior in the aftermath of the crisis (Bellucci, 2014, Indridason, 2014, Kriesi and Pappas, 2015, Magalhães, 2014, Okolikj and Quinlan, 2016, Schmitt and Teperoglou, 2015, Torcal, 2014). In contrast to that, studies focusing on crisis reactions of political parties are much more scarce (Whitefield and Rohrschneider 2016). Against the background of the strong Eurosceptic vote in the 2014 EP elections we investigate in which way Eurosceptic parties of the left and the right respond to the multiple crises of the EU (Beaudonnet and Gomez 2017; Kriesi et al., 2012; Mudde, 2007).

Using data from the Euromanifesto Project from 2004/2009 and 2014, we analyze changes in the party positions towards the EU in the shadow of the multiple crises and study the reasons thereof. The main assumption of this study is that Eurosceptic parties of the left and the right respond differently to the crises and that their country-specific manifestations are linked to these changes to an important degree. We show a general anti-European shift among the two types of Eurosceptic parties (see Figure 1).
Nevertheless, the changes in the EU polity tone are not determined by issue-based repercussions of the multiple crises, but by the EU-related evaluation – the polity mood – of the national citizenry. For far-right Eurosceptic parties, the shift is moderated by the level of public support for EU integration in their national environment (see Figure 2). Among far-left Eurosceptic parties, by contrast, we do not find that either objective nor subjective indication of the crisis moderate EU-related evaluations.

Consequently, political parties when drafting their manifestos for EP elections are not so much guided by the objective severity of political problems, nor by the evaluations of these problems by the citizenry. What matters in the end is the link that citizens themselves are able to establish between the severity of political problems on the one hand, and the responsibility of the European Union for these problems on the other. This has important consequences for our understanding of the nature and substance of political responsiveness within the EU system of multilevel governance.

References


Governments during an economic crisis are often stuck between a rock and a hard place: voters punish them for poor economic performance but the measures they take to counter high unemployment or a shrinking economy are often unpopular too. In many instances, however, governments in EU countries have no choice but to implement these unpopular measures since their political choices are severely constrained by decisions on the EU-level.

So how did governments deal with the electoral risks these policies introduced? Policy changes to help those voters hit hardest were often not feasible, given budget constraints or loan conditionalties. Instead, governments have the option to avoid and shift blame for the economic crisis in their communication to voters. But did they in fact do so? And what exactly did they communicate to the electorate?

In this study, we investigated prime ministers’ communication strategies during the most recent economic crisis in Europe. We argue that when electoral risk is high but governments’ policy options are severely limited, prime ministers will use specific communication strategies to mitigate electoral risks. We analyze two such communication strategies – blame avoidance and blame-shifting – by applying state-of-the-art quantitative text analysis methods on 5402 speeches of prime ministers in 9 EU member states. We find evidence for both strategies.

Figure 1 shows results of our analysis of blame-shifting. It plots the negative sentiment for five blame units: Banks, the EU, the troika, Germany and Greece per quarter. The y-axis presents our measure of blame-shifting, mean negative sentiment by quarter of all speeches in the countries under study.

Gijs Schumacher and Martijn Schoonvelde

Figure 1: Blame-shifting in prime minister speeches
Negative sentiment towards banks is particularly high in the UK in the first quarter of 2013. During that time Cameron gave 21 speeches of which 7 have very high values on our negative sentiment score. For example, on March 7 Cameron delivered a speech in which he describes the causes of the economic crisis in the UK: “Banks lent more than they could afford to, spurred on by an irresponsible banking culture that rewarded short-termism and unmanageable risk-taking.”

Also, he talks about the reforms his government initiated to address the crisis: “And we are supporting these reforms with what I call monetary activism, supporting this damaged banking system that would otherwise struggle and still does struggle (...).” Using multivariate models, we find the (domestic) unemployment rate to be the most consistent predictor of blame-shifting: as the domestic unemployment rate goes up, this is followed by an increase in blame-shifting towards banks, Germany, Greece and the Troika.

Figure 2 breaks our results down for left-wing and right-wing prime ministers separately. It shows that in none of the analyses GDP growth has an effect on blame-shifting among left-wing prime ministers. But left-wing ministers do shift more blame towards Greece, Germany and the Troika when unemployment increases. Conversely, right-wing prime ministers react to negative growth and rising unemployment by expressing more negative sentiment about banks.

These results indicate rising attention of governments towards economic conditions, but also increasing negativity and blame-shifting during the economic crisis. Ultimately, the national governments’ strategy of shifting the blame towards EU institutions and other countries may have broader consequences for the functioning of the EU, by making intergovernmental consensus more difficult or by adding to a more negative image of the EU which may lower support among the public. This in turn may constrain national leaders even further and strengthen their incentives to seek to avoid the blame or engage in blame-shifting.
As the European economies show positive signs of recovery moving beyond the Great Recession, the political consequences of it will certainly be enduring. The crisis context has politicised the debate over EU economic governance, stressing, in particular, the questions of the relationship between domestic and supranational authorities, and the degree of mutual solidarity between the member states. In this respect, data on mass and political elite opinions collected by the EUENGAGE Project show interesting results.

Burden sharing – namely resource pooling to cope with the post-crisis imbalances of the member states and EU economic policy coordination – i.e. shifting policy responsibility to the EU level versus a purely intergovernmental competence – are two separate solutions both in political elites and citizens’ minds. EU citizens and elites are ready to pool resources to fix economic problems but they are less keen on delegating policy competence to the EU. Thus, economic solidarity among Europeans is a more established principle than EU policy intervention, which is instead a more contested solution. The mass position is systematically lower than the elite position and in several countries (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain) this gap is actually quite large. Czech Republic, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are the countries more averse to burden sharing and EU policy coordination when the mass and elite positions are considered jointly.

Respondents (more at mass than elite level) blaming the EU for the economic crisis tend to reject policy coordination. Hence, the retrospective assessment of EU policy outputs appears to influence the attitude towards prospective policy delegation to the same EU. Perceptions of EU output inefficacy under the crisis reduce support for policy coordination at the EU level and increase the gap between citizens and political elites over future integration.
FORTHCOMING EVENTS AND SEMINARS

Measuring Euroscepticism
Unitelma Sapienza - University of Rome, 27 January 2018, V.le R. Elena 295, Rome, Italy

Citizens, Parties and Leaders in European Uncertainty Claims for the National Sovereignty
University of Siena - 16-17 February 2018, Via Mattioli 10, Siena, Italy

EUENGAGE Final Event – SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPE: Bridging the gap
Project Event, 27 February 2018, Rue du Trône 130 Brussels, Belgium

To register to participate in the Final Event click here
Congratulations to Martina Catte for her graduation within the Master Degree Strategies and Techniques of Communication at the University of Siena with a thesis titled ‘Social democrats Parties and electors in Europe: closer or farther?’ The first graduation thesis using EUENGAGE data! Data show that social democrats still represent the hard core of support for Europe.

Source: EUENGAGE First Wave Survey 2016. Percentages represent people thinking their countries have benefited from EU membership. The exact question wording is: Taking everything into consideration, would you say that [COUNTRY] has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union?

NEW PUBLICATIONS


Braun, Daniela und Sebastian A. Popa (forthcoming): This time it was different? The salience of the Spitzenkandidaten system among European parties. In: West European Politics.

FOLLOW OUR UPDATES ON EUENGAGE PUBLICATIONS AT http://www.euengage.eu/publications/
The EUENGAGE project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. Its main goal is to inquire into the current tensions between supranational EU governance and popular mobilisation at the national level, critically questioning EU driven policies and EU legitimacy, and to propose remedial actions based on sound empirical research on the relationship between public opinion, national and supranational political elites.

“The EUENGAGE project identifies in the conflicting messages emanating from the functioning of political representation a critical and urgent problem for the future of the EU.”

In this perspective it proposes to set up an interactive, dynamic, multilevel and replicable quasi-experimental research design. Using a variety of instruments and techniques, it will allow not only to study the process of representation in vivo, but also to experiment how innovative and efficient interactions between citizens and politicians can increase the awareness of citizens of the common problems of the Union, and the ability of the European leadership to respond innovatively to the discontent of public opinion.