

Contagious Euroscepticism: The impact of Eurosceptic support on mainstream party positions on European integration

Party Politics

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Abstract

This article examines whether the support for Eurosceptic challenger parties influences mainstream party position change on European integration in Western Europe. The key finding is that Eurosceptic challenger support is capable of influencing mainstream position shifts on European integration provided that, on average, EU issues are regarded as important by the Eurosceptic challengers. Moreover, the centre-left is more affected by Eurosceptic contagion since it is influenced by both radical right and radical left Eurosceptic success, whereas the centre-right is only susceptible to radical right success. The empirical analyses are based on panel regression analysis employing expert survey data provided by Chapel Hill Expert Survey. The findings presented in this article have important implications for the study of party positioning on European integration as well as for the study of party competition in general.

Keywords

Euroscepticism, European Union, party adaptation, political parties, statistical analysis

Introduction

Nicolas Sarkozy's call for the reintroduction of border control in the Schengen Area during the 2012 French presidential elections is often explained as a response to the threat posed by the radical right Front National. While there is case study evidence for the phenomenon of 'contagious Euroscepticism' (cf. Baker et al., 2008: 107; Statham and Trenz, 2013: 139; Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2008: 1), it has not been ascertained whether such patterns hold in a comparative design. This article, therefore, examines whether support for Eurosceptic challenger parties influences mainstream party position change on European integration in Western Europe.

Taking Euroscepticism seriously as a signal of popular discontent towards European unification (De Wilde and Trenz, 2012: 14), this article argues that non-governing Eurosceptic parties may provide incentives for centrist parties to shift their positions on European integration. Moreover, by putting Euroscepticism on the right-hand side of the equation, this article will go beyond the literature that focuses on Euroscepticism as a dependent variable (cf. Leconte, 2010; Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008a, 2008b), employing Eurosceptic support as the central independent variable explaining mainstream position change (Vasilopoulou, 2013).

Recent studies have shown that the issue of European integration in the domestic political arena is subjected to inter-party dynamics. These studies attempt to uncover the patterns underlying different salience strategies of parties with regards to the issue of European integration (Green-Pedersen, 2012; Hutter and Grande, 2014; van de Wardt, 2015; van de Wardt et al., 2014). This article argues, and shows empirically, that such inter-party dynamics vis-à-vis the issue of European integration are not limited to the adjustment of issue salience, but also apply to party adaptation of positional nature. In this, they follow the tradition of spatial theory of party competition first put forward by Downs (1957). Most contributions that study 'contagion effects' from the fringes pay attention to the radical right, but rarely do they take the radical left into account. With regards to the issue of European integration, both the radical right and radical left have made Euroscepticism a central tenet of their ideology (March, 2011; Mudde, 2007). Therefore, the present study will examine both the radical

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right and the radical left, since whether radical right or radical left Euroscepticism is of greater relevance is an empirical question. Following de Vries and Hobolt (2012), this article employs the distinction between challenger and mainstream parties. Challenger parties are parties that have not governed before, while mainstream parties regularly participate in governing coalitions.

Relying on data from the Chapel Hill expert survey and Ray, this article demonstrates that Eurosceptic challenger support is capable of influencing mainstream position shifts on European integration provided that Eurosceptic challengers on average regard EU issues to be important. The centre-left is more affected by Eurosceptic contagion as it is influenced by both radical right and radical left Eurosceptic success, whereas the centre-right is only susceptible to radical right success. The finding that positional shifts are conditioned by challenger issue emphasis corroborates recent findings that parties simultaneously engage in competition on the basis of both position and issue emphasis changes (Abou Chadi, 2014) and demonstrate, furthermore, that the two strategies of issue competition can affect one another. These conclusions have important implications for scholars of party competition as well as for scholars studying the domestic effects of European integration.

The interplay between mainstream and challenger parties

Spatial theory as propagated by Downs (1957) conceives political parties as rational actors attempting to maximize votes. The basic assumption that underlines this literature is that a party's policy strategy is always devised in terms of its competitor. Applications of Downs' spatial theory of party competition have shown empirically that parties do adjust their positioning on policy issues in the face of changes in their political surroundings (Adams, 2012); either with regards to changes in public opinion (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2010), or positional shifts and electoral gains of their competitors (Adams and Somer-Topcu, 2009). This article assumes that mainstream parties react on the basis of the past election results of Eurosceptic challengers. Somer-Topcu (2009: 239) has argued that '[i]n an uncertain political environment, where there are only a limited number of tools for political parties to rely on for information . . . one important source of information about changing public opinion is past election results' (see also Budge, 1994).

While Somer-Topcu and Budge were concerned with the influence of a party's own past election results on policy shifts, other studies have demonstrated the impact that fringe party support can have on mainstream positioning. Following a spatial conception of party competition, either explicitly or implicitly, these studies have focussed on 'contagion effects' from fringe parties to mainstream parties. In other words, these studies look at whether mainstream

parties adjust their positions in response to the presence or success of fringe parties. While overwhelmingly focussing exclusively on the impact of radical right mobilization on mainstream positions on immigration issues (Bale et al., 2010; Carvalho, 2013; Harmel and Svasand, 1997; Van Spanje, 2010), others also focused on the impact of green parties on mainstream attitudes towards environmental issues (Abou-Chadi, 2014; Meguid, 2005), while again others gauged the impact of fringe party populism (Rooduijn et al., 2014) and welfare chauvinism (Schumacher and van Kersbergen, 2014) on mainstream positioning.

While spatial conceptions of party competition focus primarily on party positions, the literature on issue evolution and issue ownership, on the other hand, argues that parties compete with one another on the basis of issue emphasis (cf. Carmines and Stimson, 1986; Petrocik, 1996; Schattschneider, 1960). Schattschneider has argued that politics is about the competition between parties on which political conflicts will be translated into issues on the political agenda (Schattschneider, 1960: 62). Parties mobilize or 'own' different issues and try to gain competitive advantage by emphasizing those issues (Petrocik, 1996). For instance, van de Wardt and colleagues (2014) have shown that mainstream parties have no interest in putting the issue of European integration on the agenda, since they tend to be internally divided over the issue. Challenger parties, on the other hand, can benefit electorally from mobilizing on European integration as they try to change the terms of competition.

Spatial theory and issue evolution theory have often been presented as contrasting theories of party competition. Recent studies, however, have shown how insights from spatial theory and issue evolution theory can be combined in a single explanatory model of party change (Abou-Chadi, 2014; Meyer and Wagner, 2014). Indeed, rather than conflicting theories, the two approaches reflect different aspects of competitive party politics (Meyer and Wagner, 2014: 6–7). This article then not only regards the two approaches as complementary, but also considers the interaction between the logics of party competition. More specifically, it examines whether Eurosceptic challenger parties' average EU issue emphasis conditions the impact of their electoral support on mainstream policy agendas.

European integration as a competitive issue in domestic politics

Central to the thesis that established political parties are likely to respond to successful challengers is that there is an ideological gap between challenger and mainstream parties on the issue in question. With regards to party support for European integration, studies observed that while mainstream, centrist parties generally hold pro-EU positions, parties on the radical left and the radical right are generally less supportive of European integration. Among these

studies some explain the fringe party Euroscepticism from a strategic perspective arguing that anti-European attitudes are strategic tools used by challenger parties to delineate themselves from the political mainstream, either in terms of issue ownership (Hix and Lord, 1997; Steenbergen and Scott, 2004) or in terms of positions (Taggart, 1998). Others emphasize the intrinsically ideological reasons for fringe party opposition to the EU (Hooghe et al., 2002; Kriesi et al., 2008). In this respect, radical left parties voice their resistance to the EU on the basis of its alleged 'neoliberal' character (March, 2011) and radical right parties opposing Europe on the basis of sovereignty and identity concerns (Mudde, 2007: Ch. 7).

The idea that mainstream parties may be provoked to respond to domestic Eurosceptic electoral success by shifting their policy preferences presupposes that parties believe that their positions on European integration matter when it comes to voters' party choice in national elections. Several studies focusing on the attitudinal drivers of radical party support have established that voter dispositions towards Europe can play a role (De Vries, 2007, 2010; Gabel, 2000). On the right side of the political spectrum, Werts et al. (2013) demonstrated that although ethnic threat and political distrust were the main determinants of a radical right vote, Euroscepticism is the third strongest driver. Similarly, March and Rommerskirchen (2015) have shown that voters' Euroscepticism has a positive effect on radical left support.

Moreover, recent studies have shown how European integration has become a relevant issue in domestic party competition and that Eurosceptic challengers have had an important role in this. While Green-Pedersen (2012) has argued for the case of Denmark that successful mobilization on EU issues by challenger parties is constrained by mainstream parties' reluctance to put the issue on the political agenda, other studies, by contrast, have argued that Eurosceptical challenger parties not only have the opportunity to emphasize EU issues (Hooghe and Marks, 2009), but also benefit electorally from their issue entrepreneurial strategy (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012). Moreover, the idea that mainstream parties are the only relevant players to determine the salience of EU issues has been contested as recent research has shown that challenger parties tend to exploit issues on which there is considerable dissent within governing parties, such as the issue of European integration (van de Wardt et al., 2014).

Moreover, the supposition that Eurosceptic challenger parties have leverage over mainstream parties' EU agendas has been suggested in a number of case studies (cf. Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2008: 1). For instance, the presence of the Referendum Party in the 1997 UK general election prevented Labour and the Conservatives from ignoring the European issue (Baker et al., 2008: 107). In Italy, the presence of the Eurosceptic Lega Nord and the Alleanza Nazionale as coalition partners between 2001 and 2006

arguably facilitated Berlusconi's Forza Italia to occasionally adopt a more critical stance on EU issues (Quaglia, 2008: 65). Based on data on parliamentary activities in Denmark, van de Wardt (2014) moreover has shown that niche parties are capable of influencing the extent to which mainstream parties pay attention to the issue of European integration in government speeches and parliamentary questions. These contributions suggest that 'contagion effects' from the fringes are not limited to the issue of immigration, but may well apply to European integration as well, particularly because mainstream position and emphasis co-optation are often simultaneous strategies (Abou-Chadi, 2014).

Hypotheses

When choosing an accommodative strategy, the mainstream party faces the delicate balancing act of attempting to lure supporters of the challenger to their party by incorporating elements of the challenger's policy, while not alienating their own voters' base. Yet, the more successful a challenger is, the higher the electoral potential for mainstream parties to approximate the position on the challenger's issue and the smaller the risk of an electoral backlash. Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that radical right electoral success has resulted in accommodative strategies by the political mainstream on immigration issues (Carvalho, 2013; Van Spanje, 2010).¹ De Vries has noted that the presence of EU issue voting is conditioned by a party's extremity on European integration as well as by the extent to which a party emphasizes the issue (De Vries, 2010: 108). If a party does not think differently on the issue and does not regard the issue as salient, or in other words does not mobilize on an issue, it is unlikely to compel other competitors to respond in a positional fashion. As a result, I expect that the higher the vote share of a challenger, the greater the tendency of mainstream parties is to commit themselves to accommodative strategies given that it is Eurosceptic and places emphasis on European integration. Moreover, if a party does not think an issue is salient, or in other words does not mobilize on an issue, it is unlikely to compel other competitors to respond in a positional fashion. This allows me to formulate the following hypotheses (Hypothesis 1A and 1B):

H_{1A}: The higher the electoral support for Eurosceptic challenger parties, the less supportive mainstream parties will be of European integration.

H_{1B}: The effect of electoral support for Eurosceptic challenger parties on mainstream support for European integration is stronger when the Eurosceptic challengers emphasize EU issues more on average.

The EU issue is a complex one that taps into many different aspects of party ideology (Maag, 2015). Precisely due to its multi-faceted nature, European integration does

not align neatly with economic or cultural dimensions of party competition. In this vein, Van der Brug and van Spanje (2009) have shown that – at the party-level – support for European integration is not correlated with economic or cultural dimensions of competition. What follows from this is that the issue of European integration, due to its multidimensionality, is likely to affect all mainstream parties, not just the centre-left or the centre-right.

The fact that general support for the EU does not correspond directly to economic or cultural dimensions of competition does not mean, however, that ideological predispositions do not play a role when it comes to critically assessing the European Union. The radical right and radical left address different facets of European integration and oppose the EU on very different ideological and argumentative bases (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). While the radical right withstands the EU based on cultural considerations, such as national identity and national sovereignty, the radical left emphasises the EU's economic nature as it laments its 'neoliberal character'.

Studies have suggested that as centrist parties converge over economic issues, party competition is more likely to be played out on cultural issues, while the salience of distributive issues decreases (Hooghe et al., 2002; Kriesi et al., 2008). The increased salience of the issue of immigration is a case in point. The radical right is considered a powerful actor that taps into 'cultural politics', whereas the radical left – by and large – has continued to mobilize on issues concerning wealth distribution. Moreover, recent studies have shown how issues put forward by radical right parties, such as the issue of immigration, can influence both centre-right and centre-left parties (Bale et al., 2010; Van Spanje, 2010). Arguably, the reason is that the centre-left's traditional supporters – the working-class – are likely to adhere to culturally more conservative stances. The same cannot be said of the radical left. Far left critiques of a supposed neoliberal bias in the integration process may be co-opted by the centre-left (Statham and Trenz, 2013: 139), but will not strike a chord with the centre-right.

Thus, while mainstream parties may be equally vulnerable to the 'Eurosceptic contagion' *in general* (Hypothesis 2), this does not automatically translate to the supposition that radical right and radical left Eurosceptics hold the same sway over mainstream parties' positions on European integration. Rather, the radical right's reasons for opposing Europe are likely to find broader resonance in both the electorate and among mainstream parties. Therefore, the potential of the radical right to induce an accommodative response from mainstream parties is likely to be greater than a possible impact from the radical left (Hypothesis 3).

H₂: Mainstream parties will shift their positions on European integration in response to overall Eurosceptic challenger support, regardless of their position on the left-right axis.

H₃: The influence of radical right Eurosceptics on mainstream parties' EU policy shifts is greater than the influence of the radical left.

Data and measurements

The empirical analysis that will shed light on the question whether Eurosceptic challenger party support influences mainstream position change on European integration relies on cross-sectional, longitudinal data on party positions on European integration. To test the hypotheses, I will employ a combined dataset provided by Ray (1999) and multiple rounds of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) data (Bakker et al., 2015; Hooghe et al., 2010; Steenbergen and Marks, 2007). The data collected by Ray contains data for the years 1984, 1988, 1992, and 1996 and the CHES rounds from 1999, 2002, 2006, and 2010 are included.

Expert surveys have been criticized for being measures of party reputations (as interpreted by country experts) rather than being direct measures of party positions based on party output such as election manifestos or media statements (Budge, 2000). In particular, Budge (2000: 103–104) argued that with reputational measures it is unclear on which criteria the experts evaluate a party's position; whether a party's intentions or behaviour are considered; what the specific time frame is; and whether the party as a whole, its leadership, or perhaps even its electorate is considered in the measurement. However, Steenbergen and Marks (2007: 349) have argued that clear guidelines for experts alleviate most of these issues, such as the stipulation of time frames and the focus on party leadership. Moreover, Steenbergen and Marks (2007: 352) have found that the degree of variation across experts is small (see also Ray, 1999: 288). This consent among experts can be understood as agreement over the relevant criteria and adherence to the provisions of the survey initiators. Moreover, Ray (2007b) as well as Steenbergen and Marks (2007) have shown that the convergent validity of the CHES data with other measurements of party positions on European integration is very high. The advantage of the Ray/CHES data over other datasets on party positions on European integration, such as the Comparative Manifesto Data (CMP), is the fact that the Ray/CHES data includes significantly more data on fringe parties. For instance, while the CMP data contains eight radical right and 33 radical left parties for Western Europe since 1980, the Ray/CHES data encompasses 33 radical right parties and 44 radical left parties. For a study that focuses to a great extent on such fringe parties, this is an important difference. To define whether a party is a mainstream governing party, mainstream opposition party, or a challenger party at the time of the survey round, I rely on the conceptualization put forward by de Vries and Hobolt (2012) and employ the data on party status compiled by van de Wardt et al. (2014). Importantly, the distinction between mainstream and challenger parties

also ensures that the dependent variable and the independent variables cannot overlap. If one were to rely on a definition that builds on party families, endogeneity problems could arise – especially when ‘the radicals’ come into government as was the case for the FPÖ.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable is measured as the change in European integration position per year for each mainstream party. This article employs a one-dimensional position measure for European integration. This measurement has been selected for both practical and theoretical reasons. First, while the CHES data from 1999 onwards contains data on specific EU policy issues, the data of the first four rounds of the expert survey (1984, 1988, 1992, and 1996) conducted by Ray was limited to a party’s overall EU position, EU issue salience, intra-party dissent, and position on the left-right axis. Second, European integration harbours different meanings across space and time (Ray, 1999: 286). This one-dimensional coding of a party’s position towards European integration ensures the comparability of domestic inter-party dynamics on EU issues, despite significant variation among countries with regards to the specific EU issues on the agenda. The EU position is operationalized as a 7-point scale with 1 indicating ‘strong opposition’ and 7 signalling ‘strong support’ for the European integration. In line with other studies, this article operationalizes the dependent variable as the change in mainstream party EU position (Ezrow et al., 2010; Somer-Topcu, 2009; Van Spanje, 2010). That is, the difference between a party’s EU position at $t = 0$ and $t = -1$.

Independent variables

To recall, the main independent variable signifies the electoral support of Eurosceptic challengers. To be ‘eligible’ as a Eurosceptic challenger, a party must fulfil two criteria. First, it should have challenger status as identified by de Vries and Hobolt (2012). Second, it should be Eurosceptic. Euroscepticism is defined as having an EU position score lower than 4. As Ray demonstrated, all parties identified by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2000) as either ‘soft’ or ‘hard’ Eurosceptics have a score below 4 in the CHES data (Ray, 2007a: 159). Based on these criteria the three main independent variables are constructed. The variable denoting all support for all Eurosceptic challenger parties includes all parties, regardless of party family that fulfil the three criteria. The variable captures the total amount of Eurosceptic challenger vote shares in the current CHES round. The vote share variable in the CHES data indicate the percentage of the vote a party has received in the last national election previous to the survey round. The independent variables indicating radical right and radical left Eurosceptic challenger support are similar, but only include vote shares of the

relevant party family. Table A5 in the online appendix provides a complete overview of the challenger parties. Hypothesis 1B predicted that the emphasis of Eurosceptic challenger parties on EU issues conditions the impact of Eurosceptic challenger support on the mainstream party agenda on European integration. To measure this, a variable has been created capturing the mean salience of all Eurosceptic challenger parties per country, by year. The salience variable is a five point scale, from 0 to 4.²

A party’s left-right position is measured by the variable provided by the Ray/CHES data indicating a party’s general placement on the left-right axis. To be sure, this variable indicates a party’s position with regards to its overall ideological position and is not restricted to left-right placement on economic issues.

The statistical models control for party size, mainstream party status, and public opinion on European integration. Party size will be controlled for by including the vote share the mainstream party attained in the most recent election. Besides being of substantive interest, mainstream party status could potentially drive some of the effects. Various studies have shown that mainstream opposition parties are more likely to respond to fringe party pressures (van de Wardt, 2015; Van Spanje, 2010). Therefore, the models will include a dummy indicating whether a mainstream party is in opposition. Studies have, furthermore, established that parties are sensitive to past election results when devising their policy positions (Carmines and Stimson, 1986; Somer-Topcu, 2009) and that vote loss determines mainstream responses to fringe parties (Abou-Chadi, 2014). Vote loss is operationalized as the difference in a mainstream party’s percentage of the vote between the current and the former round.

Research has shown that mainstream parties tend to adapt their positions in response to public opinion of the general electorate (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2010). With regards to the issue of European integration, it has been argued that parties respond directly to voter cues (Carrubba, 2001; see also Steenbergen et al., 2007). Thus, to make sure that effects captured in the models are not driven by public opinion, the models will control for public opinion on European integration. This will be done by including two variables indicating support for European integration in public opinion. As Lubbers and Scheepers (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2005, 2010) argue, support for European integration can both conceptually and empirically be divided into two dimensions. First, instrumental Euroscepticism (or support) concerns public opinion about whether EU membership is generally positive or negative. Political Euroscepticism, on the other hand, concerns questions of sovereignty and the desired level of decision-making for particular issue areas. The two composite measures for both instrumental and political public opinion support for European integration are constructed following Lubbers and Scheepers (2005, 2010), using Eurobarometer data.³ While the Eurobarometer data is not without its critics,

Table 1. Party-fixed effects regression models (party dummies not shown). Standard errors clustered by mainstream party (in parentheses).

Independent Variables	(1) Δ EU Position	(2) Δ EU Position	(3) Δ EU Position	(4) Δ EU Position
Eurosc. Challenger Support	-0.0210** (0.00763)		-0.0178* (0.00684)	
RRP Eurosc. Chall. Support		-0.0247** (0.00634)		-0.0249** (0.00652)
RLP Eurosc. Chall. Support		-0.0211 [†] (0.0108)		-0.0120 (0.0112)
Party Size	0.00728 (0.00791)	0.00676 (0.00741)	0.00549 (0.00614)	0.00551 (0.00592)
Opposition Party	-0.136 [†] (0.0775)	-0.133 [†] (0.0774)	-0.116 [†] (0.0594)	-0.115 [†] (0.0588)
Public Political Support			0.646** (0.222)	0.593** (0.218)
Public Instr. Support			-0.0178 (0.112)	-0.00295 (0.118)
Constant	0.219 (0.199)	0.206 (0.172)	0.135 (0.170)	0.113 (0.162)
Observations	477	477	383	383
Number of mainstream parties	94	94	90	90

[†]p < 0.10, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

it is the only data available for such a long time span. Unfortunately, the Eurobarometer data on political support has only been collected since 1989, meaning that in models that control for political support only the estimates since 1992 are taken into account.

Estimation technique

To assess the effect of Eurosceptic party support on mainstream policy, fixed effect regression analyses are conducted. To recall, the mainstream party is the unit of analysis, since we are interested in the effects of Eurosceptic challenger support on mainstream party behaviour. As Abou-Chadi has argued (2014: 11), the inclusion of party fixed effects is essential if one is to make causal claims about the effect of challenger party support on the agenda of mainstream parties. All models are calculated with Huber-White robust standard errors clustered by the cross-section identifier, the mainstream party. These standard errors are robust to both serial correlation and heteroscedasticity (Wooldridge, 2002: 57).⁴ This estimation technique is preferred over the use of panel-corrected standard-errors, since this method only applies when T is relatively large and is larger than N (Beck and Katz, 1996: 4). As a result, the following basic model is estimated:

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta \text{Mainstream EU Position}_{i,t} &= \beta_1(\text{Eurosceptic Party Support})_{i,t} \\ &+ \beta_2(\text{Party Size})_{i,t} + \beta_3(\text{Opposition Party Dummy})_{i,t} \\ &+ \beta_4(\text{Public Political EU Support})_{i,t} \\ &+ \beta_5(\text{Public Instrumental EU Support})_{i,t} + \varepsilon_i + v_{i,t} \end{aligned}$$

Hypothesis 1A is tested by regressing the combined vote share of all Eurosceptic challenger parties on the change in the mainstream party position on European integration. A statistically significant negative coefficient would point to the fact that Eurosceptic challenger support has an impact on the mainstream party EU policy agenda. Hypothesis 1B is tested by estimating the marginal effect of the Eurosceptic challenger party's salience of EU issues on the effect the Eurosceptic challenger support has on mainstream party positioning. The hypothesis that left-right placement does not affect the impact of Eurosceptic challengers (H₂) is also estimated by interaction effects for which the marginal effects are computed. Hypothesis 3 will be tested by estimating the full model, including radical right and radical left Eurosceptic challenger parties as shown above accompanied by the relevant marginal effect plots.

Results

Table 1 shows the results for the times-series cross-sectional regression models. Models 1 and 3 indicate that Hypothesis 1A can be confirmed, as Eurosceptic challenger support has a statistically significant effect on mainstream EU position change in the predicted direction.⁵ Model 3 indicates that this conclusion also holds when the models control for the public opinion variables indicating political and instrumental support, although the size of the effect decreases somewhat. Concretely, the coefficient signifies that every percent of Eurosceptic challenger vote share increase leads to a diminution of mainstream party support

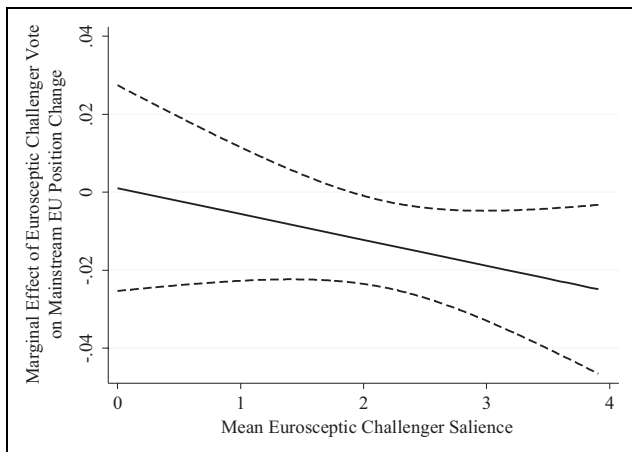


Figure 1. Marginal effect of Eurosceptic challenger vote on Δ mainstream EU position for different Eurosceptic challenger salience means.

of 0.018 on a 1 to 7 scale. The large, statistically significant coefficient of the public political support variable indicates that public opinion remains a powerful driver of mainstream policy shifts (cf. Steenbergen et al., 2007).⁶

Hypothesis 1B predicted that the effect of Eurosceptic challenger support on the dependent variable is conditioned by the mean salience that Eurosceptic challengers allocate to EU issues. Since basic regression tables with interactive terms do not allow us to assess whether mean Eurosceptic salience has a conditional effect on mainstream EU position change, it is important to show the marginal effect of Eurosceptic challenger vote for the different mean levels of challenger EU salience (Brambor et al., 2005). The most intuitive way of representing these marginal effects is a marginal effects graph. Figure 1 shows that the mean Eurosceptic challenger party salience does condition the effect of the electoral success of Eurosceptic challengers on mainstream EU policy shifts.⁷ First, it demonstrates that the greater the amount of emphasis Eurosceptic challenger parties put on EU issues, the greater the more mainstream parties will react to Eurosceptic pressure.

Second, the confidence intervals of the graph show that only in those countries or years where Eurosceptic challengers have an average EU salience of approximately 2 or higher (on a 0–4 scale) does the effect of Eurosceptic support kick in. To be clear, the CHES codebook for the 1999–2010 trend file states that a saliency score of 2 indicates that the party in question finds it ‘an important issue’ and a score of 4 means that the EU issue is a party’s most important issue. This finding supports Abou-Chadi’s (2014) argument that spatial theories of party competition and issue evolution theories can complement one another and constitute different *forms* of party competition. What is more, these findings show that spatial shifts can be conditioned by issue saliency and that, consequently, the forms

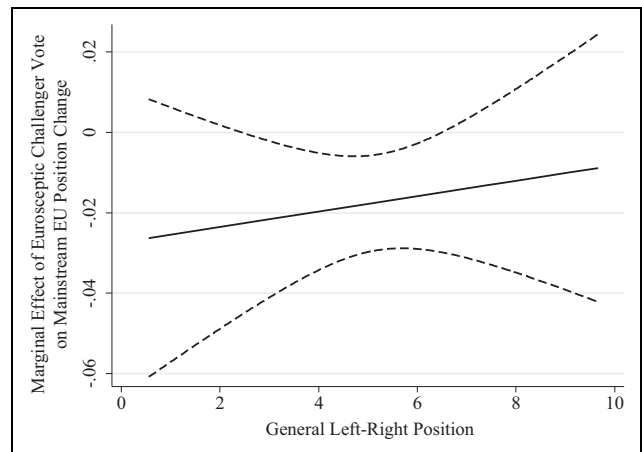


Figure 2. Marginal effect of Eurosceptic challenger vote on Δ mainstream EU position for different mainstream party left-right positions.

of party competition are intrinsically related to each other.⁸ This gives credence to the argument that spatial theories and issue evolution theories are not just different scholarly understandings of the competition between political parties, but that they shed light on different *aspects* of party competition which are by no means mutually exclusive (Meyer and Wagner, 2014).

The conditional effect of a mainstream party’s placement on the left-right axis on the impact of Eurosceptic challenger success is shown in Figure 2. As hypothesized, the mainstream party’s left-right position does not have a substantial impact, although the centre-left has a slightly greater propensity to respond to Eurosceptic challenger pressure. The graph suggests that the parties that respond to Eurosceptic pressure have a left-right placement between approximately 3 and 7, while no effect can be found for mainstream parties with more radical views.⁹ However, it is hard to draw substantive conclusions from this as the significance in the centre is also determined by the greater number of cases in the middle of the distribution.

The marginal effect graph of radical right Eurosceptic challenger support conditioned by mainstream left-right position shown in Figure 3 displays a similar slope to that in the marginal effect graph in Figure 2.¹⁰ This indicates that radical right parties indeed do not only affect the most proximate competitor. The slightly greater response from the centre-left may be explained by that the baseline support for European integration among the centre-right is

somewhat lower than among the centre-left in Western Europe. As a result, centre-left parties would have to make greater adjustments to their position on European integration were they to approach the Eurosceptic challenger’s position.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the impact of radical right challenger parties would be greater than that of the radical left. Table 1 indicates that while the radical left does seem

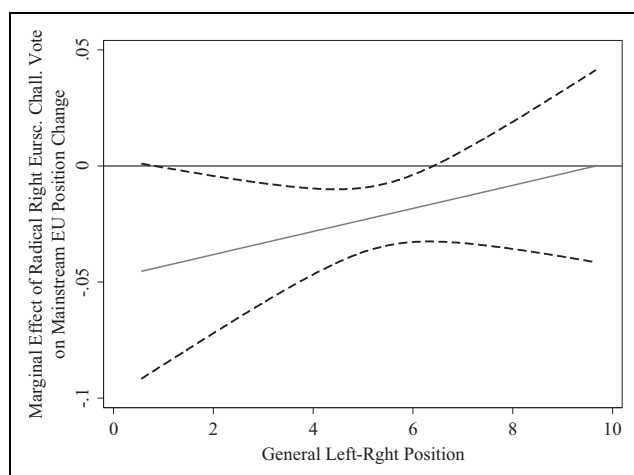


Figure 3. Marginal effect of radical right Eurosceptic challenger vote on Δ mainstream EU position for different mainstream party left-right positions.

to have statistically significant influence in Model 2, it loses significance when the public opinion controls are included in Model 4.¹¹ In addition, the coefficient of the variable measuring radical left Eurosceptic support is considerably smaller in Model 4. This suggests that while the radical right has an influence on mainstream party EU positioning, there is no detectable effect of radical left Eurosceptic success. Yet, when we take a look at the marginal effect graph of radical left Eurosceptic challenger support conditional on mainstream left-right placement in Figure 4, we see that radical left success is capable of invoking a response on the centre-left.¹² This is in line with Hypothesis 3 insofar as it shows that the radical left has a smaller effect *in general*, but when it comes to the centre-left both the radical left and the radical right play a role. In other words, while the centre-right is affected by the radical right Eurosceptic support, the centre-left is doubly affected as it adjusts its position on European integration in response to both radical right and radical left success.

In the literature, it has been suggested that a mainstream party's oppositional status influences its propensity to react to fringe party pressures. Although Models 3 and 4 of Table 1 suggest that mainstream opposition parties are more prone to changing their positions on European integration, opposition parties are not affected to a greater extent by Eurosceptic success as the average marginal effects of Eurosceptic challenger support on mainstream EU position change for the different mainstream party statuses indicated (see Table A4 in the online appendix).

In addition, previous research has found that vote loss has an effect on the propensity of mainstream parties to react to fringe parties. However, when it comes to position on European integration, vote loss on the part of mainstream parties does not cause the effect of Eurosceptic challenger support to be greater, as shown in Figure A3 which

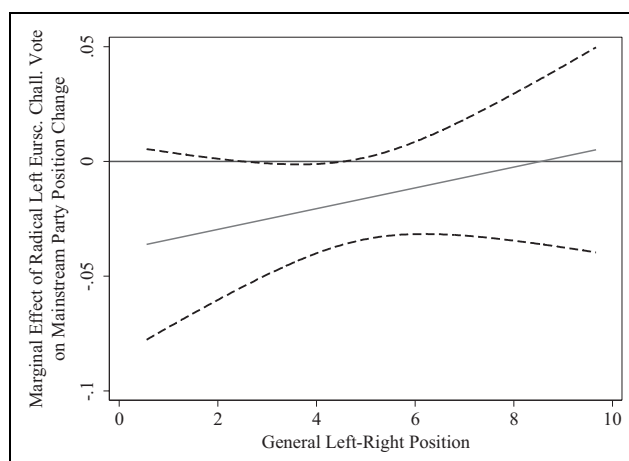


Figure 4. Marginal effect of radical left Eurosceptic challenger vote on Δ mainstream EU position for different mainstream party left-right positions.

plots the marginal effects of vote change on the Eurosceptic challenger.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that the electoral success of Eurosceptic challenger parties can provoke mainstream parties to be less supportive of European integration. While van de Wardt (2015) established that fringe party mobilization on European integration can induce mainstream parties to put more emphasis on EU issues, this article has shown that Eurosceptic success can lead to mainstream party *positional shifts*. Importantly, the influence is conditioned by the mean salience Eurosceptic challengers allocate to European integration issues. Moreover, centre-left parties are on average more affected by Eurosceptic challenger success, since they are affected by Eurosceptic contagion both from the radical left and radical right. The substantive reason for this is that centre-left parties are susceptible both to distributional and cultural anti-EU arguments. The centre-right, on the other hand, is only affected by the radical right. These results are in line with the conclusion that social democratic parties are also affected by radical right mobilization on cultural issues, such as immigration policy (Bale et al., 2010; Van Spanje, 2010). In addition, mainstream party characteristics such as vote loss and oppositional status did not have a conditional effect on Eurosceptic challengers' impact.

The findings presented in this article have important implications for the study of party positioning on European integration as well as for the study of party competition in general. First, the findings suggest that mainstream EU positioning is not a static phenomenon but, rather, is sensitive to its political surroundings. This implies that the inverted U-curve hypothesis, stipulating that centrist

parties are supportive and fringe parties disapproving of European integration, is not necessarily valid in the future, since centrist party EU positions are liable to shifts. The findings, moreover, corroborate the ‘constraining dissensus’ thesis put forward by Hooghe and Marks, who posit that since the ‘permissive consensus’ is over, ‘party leaders in positions of authority, must look over their shoulders when negotiating European issues’ (2009: 5).

Second, the findings show that positional shifts of parties in response to other parties’ electoral fortunes can be conditioned by the amount of emphasis the latter place on the issue in question. This stresses that position- and salience-based explanations of party competition do not contradict, but rather highlight different aspects of competitive politics. Whereas recent research has stressed that positioning and issue emphasis are complementary electoral strategies (Abou-Chadi, 2014; Meyer and Wagner, 2014), this article has advanced evidence that saliency and positioning strategies affect one another. Additional research should examine more closely how and under which conditions saliency and positional strategies of parties are interrelated.

Furthermore, it is important that we learn more about the complex interaction between the attitudes of parties’ core supporters and external effects influencing party behaviour. Future research should take into account the ways in which the stances and priorities of a party’s core electorate towards the EU conditions the mainstream party responses to Eurosceptic success (cf. Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008c: 257).¹³ Moreover, while this article has examined the impact of Eurosceptic success on a positional level, we should get a better understanding of whether (the threat of) Eurosceptic success leads mainstream parties to adapt their policies pre-emptively. In addition, both quantitative and qualitative content analyses should examine how the EU discourses of mainstream parties and Eurosceptic challenger parties differ and whether the latter is capable of influencing the former’s way of discussing and framing EU issues.

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Notes

1. Akkerman (2015) argues that this effect has been overstated.
2. In the data collected by Ray a five-point scale from 1 to 5 was used. This data has accordingly been rescaled.
3. For 1984 there was no data available for Spain and Portugal. Instead, the earliest available data for these countries has been used.

4. The Wooldridge test for serial correlation in panel-data models indicated no serial correlation in the models. The ‘modified Wald statistic for groupwise heteroscedasticity’ (Greene, 2000: 598) in fixed-effects models indicated that heteroscedasticity is present.
5. Additional tests have ascertained that the reverse causal relationship does not hold, i.e. that mainstream position change leads to Eurosceptic challenger success.
6. In addition, the small r-squared in all models suggests that challenger success is by no means the dominant driver of positional change on European integration (not shown).
7. The full regression tables with interactive terms can be found in the online appendix. The regression models with interactive terms include all controls except the public political EU support variable, since its inclusion would decrease the number of data points. Nevertheless, the models including the public political EU support variable yield the same substantive results.
8. The interaction between Eurosceptic challenger support and the degree of salience *mainstream parties* allocate to European issues has shown that mainstream saliency of EU issues does not have a marginal effect on mainstream EU position change (see online appendix).
9. Most of the mainstream parties with a left-right position below 3 are green parties and radical left parties with governing experience, while mainstream parties with a left-right position above 6 are a more heterogeneous group including radical right parties, protestant parties and mainstream conservative parties.
10. The regression table with the interactive terms can be found in the online appendix.
11. The insignificance of the radical left Eurosceptic challenger variable is not driven by the fact that the model including public political EU support reduces the number of observations starting in 1992. The variable is also not significant if the model is specified differently.
12. The regression table with the interactive terms can be found in the online appendix.
13. For instance, when a mainstream party has outspokenly pro-European core voters, it is less likely to react to Eurosceptic pressures. The omission of this variable does not repudiate the results, since its inclusion could account for cases with limited effects of Eurosceptic support and, as a result, the average measured effect would increase (a greater negative position change).

Supplementary material

The online appendices are available at: <http://ppq.sagepub.com/content/by/supplemental-data>.

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